ODDLY MODERN FAIRY TALES

# SMACK-BAM

## OR THE ART OF GOVERNING MEN

Political Fairy Tales of Édouard Laboulaye

*Translated and Edited by* **JACK ZIPES**

# Smack-Bam, or The Art of Governing Men

ODDLY MODERN FAIRY TALES
Jack Zipes, *Series Editor*

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Édouard Laboulaye *Smack-Bam, or The Art of Governing Men: Political Fairy Tales of Édouard Laboulaye*

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## POLITICAL FAIRY TALES OF ÉDOUARD LABOULAYE

**Édouard Laboulaye**

*Translated and Edited by*

**Jack Zipes**

**Princeton University Press** *Princeton and Oxford*

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# Smack-Bam, or The Art of Governing Men

# ■ Introduction

> In the happy country of fairies, one leaves it only to find one's way back. One suffers only to become happy, whereas pain is for us an enigma and life a struggle without end where the better people are the first to fall. There, in the country of fairies, one does not get old, and one always loves. Here, no sooner does our heart barely recover from those foolish acts of our youth than it turns serious and begins to love an object worthy of our heart. Then, our face becomes wrinkled, and our hair turns white leaving us with the feeling of ridicule. There, in the country of fairies, one knows everything in one hour or one day. Here, we pursue truth at the cost of our lives as it evades us. It flees like the marvelous bird, and when, at last, after thirty years of pain, we feel it near us, when our hand lowers to seize it, another hand more powerful freezes us and carries us off to the country from which nobody has ever returned.
>
> —ÉDOUARD LABOULAYE, *Contes bleus*, 1863

As a longtime scholar of folklore and fairy tales, I have dedicated a good deal of my research to the discovery and rediscovery of neglected writers and their collections of folk and fairy tales. In particular, I pride myself on finding and translating into English significant works by foreign authors who have not received the attention they deserve. In both my first edition of *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (2000) and the second revised edition (2015), however, I somehow omitted any reference to the fairy tales of the remarkable French writer Édouard Laboulaye (1811–1883). Moreover, I have not been the only one to neglect him. Almost all American and English encyclopedias and handbooks of fairy tales published in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries make no mention of Laboulaye. In fact, scarcely a word has been published about his fairy tales, even in French. Nor have modern editions of his fairy tales appeared in either French or English.

Why such neglect when Laboulaye, one of France's foremost jurists and politicians of the nineteenth century,[1] published highly unusual political fairy tales? His production of stories and novels is stunning in its variety.

It includes three collections of tales, *Contes bleus* (Blue Tales, 1863), *Nouveaux contes bleus* (New Blue Tales, 1868), and *Derniers contes bleus* (Final Blue Tales, 1884); experimental works of fiction, such as the moralistic novel *Abdallah, ou Le trèfle à quatre feuilles* (Abdallah, or The Four-Leaf Clover, 1859), based on traditional Arabic folk tales; the time-travel fantasy novel *Paris en Amérique* (Paris in America, 1862); and the fairy-tale novel *Le prince-caniche* (The Poodle Prince, 1867–68).

Laboulaye was a great admirer of American democracy, supported the antislavery cause of the North, wrote several books on the history of the United States and American constitutional law, and played a key role in developing the plans for the Statue of Liberty. Some of his American contemporaries considered him America's greatest friend. John Bigelow, the American ambassador to France in the 1860s, wrote: "Mr. Laboulaye's value as a friend of the Union, and of representative government was not long in being recognized in the United States. The press proclaimed his sympathetic utterances wherever the Federal mails could carry them; the Union League Club, of New York, ordered his portrait by Fagnani, which now adorns its walls, a bronze bust of him was placed in the Union League Club in Philadelphia, and at the close of our war, his name was more widely and more generally known in the United States than in Europe."[2]

So why isn't Laboulaye better known today in the United States and elsewhere? And why have his literary accomplishments gone unnoticed since the beginning of the twentieth century?

Many of Laboulaye's books were translated in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Mary L. Booth, editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, and by an anonymous translator, probably Mary E. Robinson, who published Laboulaye's tales under the titles *Old Wives' Fables* (1884) and *More Old Wives' Fables* (1885). His fairy tales, however, ostensibly published for and dedicated to children, were actually too sophisticated to be classified as children's literature or to be read by children. Indeed, before including them in books, Laboulaye published most of them in the distinguished *Journal des débats* (Journal of Debates), a weekly newspaper for highly educated readers,[3] who would have noted their political significance. Indeed, they were quite successful mainly among adults. Given his extraordinary past, I believe it is time to reconsider Laboulaye's achievement as a writer of unusually wry fairy tales filled with biting social commentaries, philosophical reflections, and strong notions of social justice.

■

Born into a renowned bourgeois family in Paris in 1811 during the First French Empire, Laboulaye received a classical education at the Collège Louis-le-Grand and the University of Paris School of Law. He then began working with his brother Charles, who had bought a type foundry in the early 1830s. Although Laboulaye was successful in this business, he had other, more intellectual and political interests. He continued to study and write about comparative jurisprudence and the evolution and history of law. He made trips to Germany to deepen his understanding of social justice, and was influenced by the German historical school of law fostered by Friedrich Carl de Savigny, who played an important role in the education of the Brothers Grimm at the University of Marburg. Savigny's aim was to demonstrate through meticulous historical research that laws were not "natural" but originated in the customs and practice of the people in a given society, and that these laws changed as people transformed their social values. In 1839, under the influence of Savigny, Laboulaye published *Histoire du droit de propriété foncière en Occident* (History of Landed Property in Europe), which was awarded a prize by the Academy of Inscriptions and Belle-Lettres. Three years later he was received at the bar as a lawyer and in 1849 was appointed professor of comparative law at the Collège de France.

All of these accomplishments resulted from his pioneering research and publications during this period. In 1840, he published *Essai sur la vie et les ouvrages de Savigny* (The Life and Works of Savigny), which introduced the German scholar's historical and interdisciplinary methods to French scholars. Laboulaye himself applied these methods in his famous book, *Recherches sur la condition civile et politique des femmes depuis les Romains jusqu'à nos jours* (The Civil and Political Condition of Women from the Time of the Romans to Our Present Days, 1843), and also in the significant study *Essai sur les lois criminelles des Romains concernant la responsabilité des magistrats* (Essay on Roman Criminal Laws Concerning the Responsibility of the Magistrates, 1845). These early works reveal Laboulaye’s strong democratic inclinations and ethical principles, which led him to support the French revolution of 1848. Although he did not support the violent overthrow of the monarchy, Laboulaye later wrote that the turbulence caused by the 1848 revolution changed his life. Gradually, he became a Left liberal who opposed violence and believed in peaceful reforms of the government. Therefore, he was disappointed that the legislature failed to revise the French constitution to grant autonomy to communes and regional districts. Laboulaye believed that the centralization of government would always lead to autocracy, if not tyranny. Indeed, this was what happened in 1852, when Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte (Napoleon III) brought about a coup d’état and established the autocratic Second Empire, which was to last until 1870.

Laboulaye became one of the foremost critics of the Second Empire, which he more or less regarded as a despotic reign. In *The French Second Empire*, the historian Roger Price notes, “The 1860s would be characterized by a rising tide of opposition stimulated by criticism of the Emperor’s foreign policy and commercial treaties. Irreconcilable liberals … were able to appeal to a variety of groups anxious to defend their ‘vital’ interests by imposing parliamentary controls over the errant monarch. The essential liberal position of the liberals was expressed by Édouard de Laboulaye in a pamphlet on *Le parti libéral, son programme et son avenir* published in 1863. According to Laboulaye, the objective for liberals was ‘above all to spread liberty throughout our institutions, because it is liberty alone which identifies the problems and which resolves them.’ ”[4]

Since Laboulaye believed that the sovereignty of the French people was endangered by laws that brought about censorship and oppression, he sought another constitutional model for democracy. He turned to the United States to explore the possibility of adopting in France some American legal principles and practices. As Walter Gray has pointed out in the most thorough study of Laboulaye’s political works, *Interpreting American Democracy in France*, “Two themes dominated his writings during the Second Empire: liberty, religious and political, and America, her history and institutions. For Laboulaye, who was disillusioned with the aftermath of 1848 in France, the study of American history and politics furnished a model of liberty and a stable political system that he hoped his fellow Frenchmen would emulate and establish American democracy in France. Furthermore, the course of American history in the 1850s and

1860s, the period of the American Civil War, illustrated for him the heroic efforts necessary to preserve liberty and to maintain a stable government."[5]

Laboulaye wrote a three-volume history of the United States, *Histoire des États-Unis d'Amérique* (1855–66), and also published more than a hundred essays and studies, up through the foundation of the Second Republic in 1871, on a range of topics, among them the revolution in Germany, slavery in America, religious liberty, secularism, the limits of the state, libraries and literary property, and political liberty in France. As a scholar, Laboulaye was remarkably knowledgeable about diverse subjects. As an activist, he helped to found the French antislavery society in the 1860s, influencing the French government's decision to remain neutral during the American Civil War and thereby depriving the South of important materials and financial support.

It was also during the late 1850s and 1860s that Laboulaye turned to fairy tales to critique the abuse of power by the French hierarchical state and to embed his moral and ethical principles in strikingly political narratives. That is, he hoped to draw attention to well-known European, Asian, and African folk tales by transforming their messages into unusual stories of social justice relevant to the situation in France. This can be seen in his *Contes noirs et blancs* (Tales by Black and White Storytellers, 1858), *Abdallah, ou Le trèfle à quatre feuilles* (Abdallah, or The Four Leaf-Clover, 1859), "Perlino" (1859–60), "La bonne femme" (The Good Woman, 1861), *Contes bohêmes* (Bohemian Tales, 1861–62), *Pif Paf, ou L'art de gouverner les hommes* (Smack-Bam, or The Art of Governing Men, 1862–63), all published in the *Journal des débats*. Later, he collected the majority of these tales and published and republished them in his books *Contes bleus*, *Nouveaux contes bleus*, and *Derniers contes bleus*, until his death in 1883.

While Laboulaye's fairy tales and other fictional works, such as *Paris en Amérique* (1862), in which a Frenchman and his family are transported mysteriously to America to experience "true democracy," were unusual critiques of French social and political conditions, Laboulaye used his fiction to reinforce his political convictions and to avoid censorship. As Napoleon III loosened his authoritarian control in the 1860s, Laboulaye felt freer to publish overtly political works such as *L'état et ses limites* (The State and Its Limits), and *Le parti libéral, son programme et son* *avenir* (The Liberal Party, Its Program, and Its Future), both of which went through more than seven editions after their initial publication in 1863. These works presented key ideas that guided his political activism as well as the themes in most of his tales. He argued that all citizens, including women and serfs, were meant to enjoy full individual rights. He also advocated for the separation of state and religion, free education, complete freedom of teaching, freedom of association, freedom of the press, commerce, and industry, and independent municipalities.

By the time the Franco-Prussian War erupted in 1870, Laboulaye hoped France would emerge victorious and transform itself into a modern democracy. Consequently, he supported the French regime that he had always despised, expecting that the Napoleonic government would bring about reforms. After the Prussian victory, however, Laboulaye withdrew to the countryside in shame and disappointment. When he returned to Paris in 1873, he was elected deputy to the national assembly and he helped defeat the monarchists and guarantee the formation of the Third Republic. He was one of the primary writers of the new constitution, and was elected a life senator in 1875. The following year he was appointed administrator of the Collège de France and continued to hold lectures there until his death in 1883. While his legacy as a great jurist, historian, and political figure in France ultimately overshadowed his literary work, he deserves recognition as a writer of ironic, pithy, and philosophical fairy tales published, in part, to provoke and delight readers of the *Journal des débats* and even the conservative thinkers of his times.

■

In 1869, Laboulaye wrote an introduction to an important collection of fairy tales, *Contes allemands du temps passé* (German Fairy Tales of Olden Times), translated and edited by Félix Frank and E. Alsleben. In this introduction, Laboulaye not only demonstrated an extraordinary knowledge of folk and fairy tales but also made an interesting declaration that, I believe, served as the purpose for his own unusual political tales: “If ever a true scholar appears on earth, that is to say, a man who, instead of collecting old stones or labeling old bones, has the saintly ambition to write the history of the human spirit and ideas which, in turn, have been perpetuated throughout generations, one of the first subjects that will necessarily concern him will be the geography and chronology of fairy tales. The day when an erudite scholar will have done this considerable work, people will be astonished to see what role the tales have played in the development of civilization."[6]

Laboulaye was by no means this scholar, but he certainly was moved to demonstrate that universal and popular fairy tales played a major role in the civilizing process of every country in the world. This is why he rewrote and adapted folk and fairy tales from Senegal, Iceland, Estonia, Spain, Italy, Germany, Scandinavia, Greece, Turkey, and other nations. He did *not* translate these tales: instead, he adapted them freely to draw parallels with conditions in other countries and also to develop a particular critique of social and political conditions in France. Laboulaye was an ironic critic who delighted in mocking hierarchies, asserting the rights of women, deploring the exploitation of the poor and needy, revealing the hypocrisy of elites, and explaining how power was often abused by the wealthy. He imbued all his tales with a strong sense of social justice and compassion for the oppressed. Though his stories took place in another time and place, it is clear that he always had French politics and social practices in mind when he adapted his tales. In three of his longer, innovative works—*Abdallah, or The Four-Leaf Clover, Paris in America*, and *The Poodle Prince*—which might also be considered political tracts, and which were very popular during his lifetime, Laboulaye employed meta-phorical narratives to convey both his hope for reform and his dismay at the tactics used by elite groups to block the constitutional rights of ordinary people. All three books were written during the Second Empire, when authoritarianism in France caused thousands of people to be arrested and banished from the country. Laboulaye's use of subversive fiction and fairy tales during this period enabled him to vent his displeasure with the ruling classes, and perhaps to stir more people to take action against the Caesarism of Napoleon III.

In his earliest novel, *Abdallah, or The Four-Leaf Clover*, Laboulaye, a devout but progressive Catholic, who was critical of the church as an institution, sought to shame Christians in France by depicting the great moral humanity of the Muslim faith. He spent well over a year reading and rereading the Koran and doing research on customs and values in the Middle East. The novel clearly is based on typical folk-tale motifs and plots involving rivalry among friends, competition for a beautiful young woman, and treachery.[7] The narrative concerns two young boys—Omar, which means ass in Arabic, and Abdallah, which signifies the servant of God in Arabic—and how their upbringing and environment shape their destinies. Omar's father, Mansour, is a wealthy Egyptian merchant, a freethinker, who believes more in the devil than in God. He wants his son raised with Abdallah, the son of a Bedouin woman, Halima, whose husband was killed while protecting one of Mansour's caravans. Although Mansour himself does not believe in the ways of Muslims, he wants his son, Omar, to adapt to their customs because he thinks it will make Omar a stronger and smarter merchant when it comes time for his son to take over his business. He worries when a dervish reads Omar's horo-scope and tells Mansour: "His best friend will be his worst enemy."[8] Still, he is somewhat relieved when the dervish grants him three wishes. He asks that the baby Omar be rich all his life, have good health, and love no one, but think only of himself. In contrast, Halima wishes only for her son Abdallah to be happy and virtuous. The dervish informs her that the only way Abdallah can achieve these goals is to find a four-leaf clover. Then he disappears.

For the next sixteen years Omar and Abdallah grow up in the desert, learn the sacred Muslim values of the Bedouins, and become the best of friends. At sixteen, Mansour takes Omar back to Egypt, where the young man gradually becomes one of the wealthiest and most powerful merchants in the Middle East after his father's death. Indeed, Omar lives according to the creed of avarice and has feelings for no one but himself. Meanwhile, Abdallah becomes one of the most venerated Bedouins in the desert, often helping others in need. In his search for the four-leaf clover, he lives according to the Muslim principles of kindness, hospitality, generosity, and respect of God. When he and Omar meet as young men, they still feel a deep friendship for one another, but their moral principles clash. Moreover, Omar becomes incensed when a young woman named Leila, whom he wants for his wife, decides to wed Abdallah. Consequently, Omar brings about the deaths of Halima, Abdallah's adviser Hafiz, and Leila. Although Abdallah has an opportunity to kill Omar, he cannot bring about the death of the man he loved as a brother, and is left to die alone in the desert. Later, a slave loyal to Abdallah kills Omar and then goes into the desert to die next to Abdallah.

In many respects Laboulaye’s “religious” novel is more a Bildungsroman than a folk narrative. In fact, one could say that *Abdallah* is a “twin” novel of education that traces the development of two young men whose moral development depends on their education and advisers. Tragically, there is no happy resolution to their differences, but it is clear that Laboulaye favors Abdallah’s ethical principles as the preferred values he wishes people, in particular, the French, would cultivate in a liberal and just society. That this would prove to be impossible is the message he delivered in his next intriguing novel of magic realism.

*Paris in America* was written in the ironic style that became characteristic of most of his fairy tales. The novel is composed for the most part in the first person by Dr. René Lefebvre, Laboulaye’s alter ego, who doubts the powers of an American mesmerist, Jonathan Dream, who delivers a speech on magnetism in Paris. In a heated exchange with Dr. Lefebvre, Dream declares that he will transport not only the doctor but also his family and the entire city of Paris to America. Indeed, the next morning Lefebvre wakes up in Massachusetts along with his family. At first, the doctor thinks that he is dreaming, but then he must admit that he, his family, and the population of Paris have somehow been brought to America. What is most strange is that his family and the Parisians act as though they have always lived in America: they are Americans. Since the doctor has always held negative opinions about America and considered the people and the country somewhat anarchical and coarse, he is surprised to find that the Americans he meets have strong family and social values, believe in religious pluralism, support freedom of the press, and seek to promote education for all people. As he gradually sheds his anti-American prejudices, he is elected first as inspector general of transportation and then as attorney general. He visits churches, newspaper offices, schools, and hospitals and realizes that Americans embrace different creeds and respect different ways of life more than the French. Finally, he becomes a dedicated democrat and, like most of the people in “Paris, Massachusetts,” he supports the North as the Civil War erupts. It is at this point that Lefebvre, his family, and the residents of Paris are whisked back to France, where Lefebvre begins to espouse the democratic way of life and hopes to bring about reforms in France.

When Dr. Lefebvre talks about his experiences in America, however, and advocates for change in France, his family and a medical doctor named Olybrius believe that he is ill and had suffered from the effects of opium that was allegedly used to cure him. In discussing America, Olybrius tells him:

> Your brain is not in a normal state. A society without administration, without army, without gendarmes, with the savage liberty of praying, thinking, speaking, and acting, each in his own way, is, you must grant, one of those abominable nightmares, which opium alone can bring forth. Your system would not last a quarter of an hour; it is the negation of all the principles and conditions of that civilization which makes the unity of our grand nation. By constituting a hierarchical and centralized administration, the wisdom of our fathers long since raised France to the first rank, and taught Frenchmen that liberty is obedience. In this is our glory and strength; do not forget it, my dear friend, and return to yourself. These anarchical ideas which trouble your brain, and which never before entered the head of a Frenchman, tell you plainly that you are ill,—and the more ill that you do not feel it.[9]

Dr. Lefebvre protests, but the more he protests, the more he is considered dangerously mad and consequently is incarcerated in an insane asylum. The novel ends ironically with Lefebvre writing from the madhouse: “My fate is fixed; I have played a dangerous game, and lost. A fool, who entitles himself a physician, has declared me mad; my good friends joyfully confirm the decree of ignorance. Here I am shut up, and forever. Can I extinguish the flame which illuminates my brain? Can I deny the truth? No; I have known liberty; I have tasted on my lips this intoxicating honey, I have caught a glimpse of the eternal ideal, I am mad! I will not be cured!”[10]

The ending of *Paris in America* evokes a phrase uttered in Hermann Broch’s post-World War II trilogy *The Sleepwalkers*, in which one of the characters asks: Are we insane because we have not gone insane? Laboulaye anticipates this critique by one hundred years, and is more specific in his comments: “Frenchmen have even more wit than they attribute to themselves. To imprison those who think, speak, and reason is a master-stroke, the success of which is infallible. Where force is, there is public opinion. Go, happy sheep, browse in silence; bleat to yourselves that you are the kings of the world, your shepherds will not be the ones to refuse you this innocent pleasure. Amuse yourselves, enjoy life, you have nothing to fear; the mad men are under bolts, they would disturb your quietness; the wiser one is, the more he laughs.”[11]

Though a professor at an esteemed institution, the Collège de France, and a respected member of the establishment, Laboulaye wrote from the margins. His fiction granted him “fool’s freedom,” allowing him to speak freely about the hypocritical and savage ways of the civilizing process in France. His third novel, *The Poodle Prince*, also translated as *The Spaniel-Prince*, is another vigorous and comic commentary about the absurd customs of the French ruling class and government. In this case, it takes the form of a long, delightful fairy tale based on the deep tradition of tales about magical transformation of humans into animals. Laboulaye was probably familiar with Apuleius’s second-century Latin novel *The Golden Ass*, in which a young man is turned into a donkey for having insulted the goddess Isis and must undergo various tests before he is turned back into a human.

He sets his fairy-tale novel in the once-upon-a-time kingdom of the flycatchers or ninnies. He uses the French term *Gobe-mouches*, which connotes simpletons who will believe almost anything they hear. These people are ruled by the royal family Tulips (read Bonaparte). At the beginning of the story, the queen has not been able to have a child until heaven grants her a son named Jacinth. She and her husband invite the Fairy of the Day to become godmother. After this fairy’s malicious sister, the Fairy of the Night, suspiciously bestows the baby with strength, beauty, and intelligence, the so-called good Fairy of the Day surprisingly tells the king and queen that she will turn Jacinth into a poodle when he turns sixteen. From then on, she says, she will change him from poodle to young man and back again whenever she wishes, until he learns more about democratic governing and the treachery of his advisers and courtiers.

Indeed, after his father, the king of the ninnies, dies, and Jacinth, the new king, turns sixteen, the boy is advised by three ministers—that is, by three conniving nincompoops, who swindle him. As a dog, however, Jacinth is often present at secret, treacherous discussions, including a conversation that involves the beautiful daughter of one of the ministers, who pretends to love him but actually disdains him. After overhearing their conversations in his canine form, Jacinth in his human form exposes them and takes control of the government, a king who wants to abolish the monarchy. He calls upon the Fairy of the Day to help him invent a constitution that will promote the happiness of his people. The fairy advises him to grant freedom, work, and autonomy to his people, but

Jacinth wants more consultation and views on democracy. The fairy takes him to visit Aristotle and Ahasuerus and young democracies such as Liberia and the United States. In the end, “he drew up a constitution in twelve articles, which … was exactly the same as the charter of Liberia. In reality, it was the fortieth edition of the constitution of the United States, which is going through all the countries of the new world, and which will some day arrive in Europe, after having regenerated the Chinese.”[12] There is no “typical” happy ending to this strange fairy-tale novel, but it is clearly an optimistic work that resonates with a utopian spirit characteristic of Laboulaye’s fairy tales.

■

Laboulaye’s hopeful or utopian spirit distinguishes his work from others in the history of the literary fairy tale in France, if not in Europe. In the context of his times, he was unique. First, he was one of the few writers during the period, 1855–1880, who experimented with fairy tales of diverse types to mock the emperor and the government. Second, none of the fairy-tale writers were more seriously engaged in the politics of France, and none sought to confront the drastic measures taken by Louis Napoleon in the 1850s and 1860s by writing fairy tales in a popular weekly newspaper and then publishing them in books. Finally, no other French writers displayed a critical utopian ideology in their fairy-tale works that sustained central tenets of the liberal party as Laboulaye did. As Sudhir Haza-reesingh points out in *From Subject to Citizen: The Second Empire and the Emergence of Modern French Democracy*, “there were two distinct clusters of liberals during the Second Empire, and on one side were the optimistic liberals, who saw themselves as the inheritors of the Enlightenment values of reason and progress. Liberalism has a faith, in the belief of progress, as well as the conviction that freedom is valuable and beneficial, that truth can emerge from discussion, and that infinite perfectibility is the natural trend of humanity. This progressive liberalism was open, tolerant, trusting, and humane; it was a liberalism of hope. Its practitioners were men such as Prévost-Paradol, Laboulaye, and Ollivier, who were often not far removed from the values espoused by moderate republicans; like them, in particular, they rejected conservatism and believed in the possibility of incremental change and political accommodation."[13] This liberalism of hope is essential to understanding the viewpoints that Laboulaye took in his fairy tales, even when he was reluctant to write happy endings.

Fairy tales created and published later in France, during the rise of the Third Republic in the 1870s and turn of the twentieth century, were totally different from Laboulaye's radical tales. In *Fairy Tales for the Disillusioned: Enchanted Stories from the French Decadent Tradition*, Gretchen Schultz and Lewis Seifert write, "Trends in literature during the second half of the [nineteenth] century would also seem to have been inhospitable to the genre of the fairy tale… . The fairy tale nonetheless thrived at the end of the century: one critic writes of an 'invasion of fairies' around 1880. This burst in production of fairy tales coincided with the decadent movement… . Beyond its literary and artistic manifestations, decadence could be called a philosophical position that took issue with the celebration of progress… . Although it was much more innovative and experimental than was the stylistic conservatism of naturalist fiction, decadent literature followed a logic that was *politically* conservative."[14]

Laboulaye was anything but conservative in his fairy tales, which preceded the work of the "decadents." Above all, he was exceedingly moral. In his introduction to the Icelandic tales, which he published in *Nouveaux contes bleus*, he wrote: "In fairy tales imagination reigns with absolute domination. It is there that it establishes an ideal of justice, and it is through this process that the tales, no matter what one says, become a moral reading.—But they are not true, people say.—Certainly, but it is because of this that they are moral. Mothers, if you love your sons, do not let them study history too early. Let them dream while they are young. Do not shut their souls to the first breath of poetry. Nothing could be worse than a wise rationale child who only believes in what he can touch. Such precocious children at ten years of age will be fools by the time they turn twenty, or what is even worse, selfish egoists. Let them feel indignant by Bluebeard so that they will later still bear hatred of injustice and violence even when it does not affect them personally."[15]

In the present collection I have selected sixteen unusually just and political tales, taken from those originally published in the *Journal des débats* and in his three fairy-tale collections. They are arranged in chronological order to show how they stem from the conflicts over liberty and justice in the period in which Laboulaye wrote them. In addition, these tales represent Laboulaye's style and ideology, and reveal his effort to change the world through fairy tales, or at the very least, to mock and critique the ruling elites of his times. Change for the better, he thought, was inevitable. Though he often noted that he was adapting a folk tale from some other country, he very rarely gave the exact source, and when he did, it is clear that his method of translation and adaptation heightened the political aspects of the tale.

"Briam the Fool," for example, draws from Jon Arnason's "The Story of Brjám" in *Icelandic Legends*.[16] Arnason was one of the foremost Icelandic folklorists of the nineteenth century, and his version of "Briam the Fool"—he also published a variant of "The Little Gray Man"—was much more simplistic, terse, and conciliatory than Laboulaye's adaptation. Arnason's was much closer to the oral tradition, and his tale includes a princess, whom Brjám weds after he has taken revenge by causing the death of the king, after which he himself becomes king. Laboulaye's protagonist Briam has much more agency than Brjám, and the narrator of the tale is deft and ironic. Most important, after the king and captain of the guards are killed, the narrator explains that Briam refuses the good queen's offer to live in the castle. Instead, he returns to his mother and then disappears. His rejection of the aristocracy is the "happy end" of the tale. Indeed, in the 1860s, Laboulaye himself wanted very little to do with the French monarchy, and his tales strike a note for liberty, especially for the common people.

In "Zerbino the Bumpkin," adapted from a Neapolitan collection Laboulaye does not name, he depicts the king and his prime minister as arrogant fools, more stupid than Zerbino, the simple woodcutter, who unwittingly is granted the power to have all his wishes fulfilled after he acts kindly to a fairy. Without realizing it, he causes the king's daughter, Aleli, to fall in love with him. The king banishes Zerbino and his daughter from his kingdom with an irritating prime minister as company. Eventually, Zerbino and Aleli get rid of the prime minister and choose to abandon the pretentious court society for life on an enchanted island. It is quite possible that Laboulaye based his version of this tale on either Giovan Francesco Straparola's "Pietro the Fool" in *Le piacevoli notti* (The Pleasant Nights, 1550–53) or Giambattista Basile's "Peruonto" in *Lo cunto de le cunti* (The Tale of Tales, 1634).[17] In these variants, the woodcutter gets angry at the princess and wishes her to become pregnant, and the king then sends the two of them, with their child, off to sea in a barrel. Thanks to the woodcutter's magic powers, however, they make their home on an island and eventually reconcile with the king. Laboulaye dismissed such reconciliation because of his more defiant political perspective. Instead of a comic tale about a miraculous pregnancy that baffles a princess and her father and causes their "King Lear" separation, Laboulaye's version focuses on the unjust, absolutist king and his opportunistic prime minister, and their conflict with a woodcutter, whose integrity makes the king and minister look like fools.

Laboulaye firmly believed that it was only through moral education and human compassion that politicians could bring about good government. This is the major theme in one of his longer fairy tales, and the title story of this collection, "Smack-Bam, or The Art of Governing Men," which more than likely was based on amusing Italian stories such as Laura Gonzenbach's "Sorfarina" in *Sicilianische Märchen* (Sicilian Fairy Tales, 1870) and Giuseppe Pitrè's "Catarina la Sapienti" (Catarina the Wise) in *Fiabe, novelle e racconti popolari siciliani* (Popular Sicilian Fairy Tales, Novellas, and Stories, 1875). In the Sicilian versions, which were told and disseminated in the first half of the nineteenth century, a prince is sent to a school taught by a bright, attractive young woman from the middle class, who smacks him when he does not pay attention to her lessons. He vows revenge, weds her, and imprisons her when she refuses to apologize for the smack. He then decides to leave and spend time in Rome, Naples, and Genoa. Thanks to the help of a fairy or her father, depending on the version, the young woman sails to these cities and seduces him. When he wants to marry a princess, she still does not want to apologize, and she confronts him with his three children. The prince then realizes how much he really loves his wife. Although Laboulaye keeps many of the comic aspects of this tale type, he makes incisive political changes that expose the shallowness of the prince, who must be groomed to learn how to govern more seriously and to oppose corruption that almost leads to a coup d'état. Laboulaye weaves familiar themes throughout this tale: the aristocracy is shallow and basically seeks to gain wealth and power; the aristocracy needs to learn how to govern these tendencies to enhance the independence and liberty of the people; women are just as intelligent, if not more intelligent, than men and can govern wisely; there are not any conclusive happy endings in life, only struggles that reveal the moral integrity of the people engaged in conflicts.

Laboulaye weaves philosophical and political proverbs and comments in his tales to critique the decadence of the French civilizing process while also suggesting that there is room for optimism. Some of his proverbs in "Zerbino the Bumpkin" are

> There is nothing finer than glory, but it has its disadvantages.
> As the song says, after three refusals, good luck.
> One tires of everything, even of happiness.

Proverbs in "The Eve of St. Mark" include

> A woman does not like to have her heart and mind read.
> Do not scratch others, if you don't want to be flayed alive.
> To be loved is the privilege of youth.
> Life is the dream of a shadow.
> Sickness is the monopoly of humans.
> Life is a dream that begins and ends in nothingness. Such is the destiny of humans.

Laboulaye gives strong hints that the world would be a better place if women asserted themselves to determine their rights, or if they reigned instead of men. This can be seen in such tales as "The Young Woman Who Was Wiser Than the Emperor," "The Lazy Spinner," and "The Story about the Tailor and His Daughter."

In his early introduction to *Contes bleus*, Laboulaye explained why fairy tales were just as valuable as political and philosophical tracts:

> Where does this particular taste that people have for the marvelous come from? Is it that a lie is sweeter than truth? No, a fairy tale is not a lie. And the child who is amused by fairy tales or frightened by them is not deceived by them for an instant. The tales are the ideal, something truer than the truth of the world, the triumph of goodness, beauty, and justice. Innocence always wins. Often, it is true, that the victim spends thirty years in a dungeon with serpents. Sometimes the victim is even cut into pieces, but in the end things work out. The villain is always punished. It's not necessary to wait for a better world to punish crime and to crown virtue.
>
> The secret of these marvelous tales can be found there! It is what constitutes the charm of the fairies. It is not gold or silver that spreads the tales everywhere but the magic wand which restores order on earth and at the same time annihilates those two enemies of human life, space and time. What does it matter that Griseldis suffers fifteen years of exile and desertion! In the final test, she will be young and kind as she was on the first day.[18]

Through suffering and struggle against injustice, many of the protagonists in Laboulaye's tales develop self-awareness, along with an awareness of the evil in the world. In "Fragolette," the young maiden suffers abuse from a nasty witch until she realizes how love can save her. In "The Little Gray Man," a small prince endures various trials until he wins a princess. But suffering and human compassion do not always bring about happiness.

Laboulaye was particularly critical of greedy people. Consequently, the comic tale "The Fairy Crawfish," a tale that resembles the Grimms' "The Fisherman's Wife," mocks a peasant's wife who wants to become God. "The Prudent Farmer" portrays a man who resists greed and chooses wisdom, which enables him to avoid murder and achieve happiness. In these tales, learning to know the world through magic enables "good" people to succeed in their effort to live just lives.

Despite this "utopian" perspective, Laboulaye was disenchanted by the sociopolitical changes in France and was often skeptical about the possibility of humane change. In fact, his tales also show his great disappointment in the failure of human beings to establish societies in which everyone receives just treatment. In such stories as "Falsehood and Truth," truth is mocked and buried, and in "The Eve of St. Mark," a young boy dies after realizing how cruel humans are to one another. Only through tender love and kindness can people, who embody the moral imperative "Do unto others as you would have done unto you," survive and find happiness.

Ironically, or perhaps, unfortunately, everything negative that Laboulaye depicted in his fairy tales—corrupt governments, war, exploitation of the poor, greed, murder—is familiar to twenty-first-century readers. Laboulaye was a sensitive and perceptive critic of his times. He also was an ethical philosopher who foresaw the deeply rooted social and political problems that continue to haunt us. Strikingly, his ideas and tales remain relevant in our present conflicted times.

## Notes

1. Laboulaye's significance as a politician is often recorded in histories of the Second Empire and Third Republic. See the bibliography. Recently there was an entire colloquium titled "Pensée Juridique et Politique d'Édouard Laboulaye (1811–1883)," dedicated to his work and influence at the Centre de Philosophie Juridique et Politique, Université de Cergy-

Pontoise, on December 9, 2016. The talks from this conference will be published in the *Revue française d'histoire des idées politiques* in 2018.

2. John Bigelow, *Some Recollections of the Late Édouard Laboulaye* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1889): 17.

3. Published between 1789 and 1944, the *Journal des débats* played a leading role in influencing French culture and politics during Laboulaye's lifetime. In fact, Laboulaye contributed not only his fairy tales to this weekly but also his political essays, lectures, and book reviews.

4. Roger Price, *The French Second Empire: An Anatomy of Political Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 298.

5. Walter D. Gray, *Interpreting American Democracy in France: The Career of Édouard Laboulaye, 1811–1883* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994): 32.

6. Édouard Laboulaye, introduction to *Contes allemands du temps passé*, trans. and ed. Félix Frank and E. Alsleben (Paris: Didier, 1869): vii.

7. The tale type is called "Best Friend, Worst Enemy," ATU 921B, and numerous variants can be found throughout the world. See Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales*, vol. 1 (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2004): 547.

8. Édouard René Lefebvre-Laboulaye, *Abdallah; or The Four-Leaved Shamrock*, trans. Mary L. Booth (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1892): 17.

9. Édouard Laboulaye, *Paris in America by Dr. René Lefebvre, Parisian*, trans. Mary L. Booth (New York: Scribner, 1863): 355.

10. Ibid., 363–64.

11. Ibid., 364.

12. *The Spaniel-Prince*, trans. Mary E. Robinson (London: Simpkin, Marchall, 1895): 221.

13. Sudhir Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen: The Second Empire and the Emergence of Modern French Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998): 187–88.

14. Gretchen Schultz and Lewis Seifert, eds., *Fairy Tales for the Disillusioned: Enchanted Stories from the French Decadent Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016): xx–xxi.

15. Édouard Laboulaye, *Nouveaux contes bleus* (Paris: Furne, Jouvet, 1868): 6–7.

16. See Jon Arnason, *Icelandic Legends*, vol. 2, trans. George Powell and Eirikr Magmusson (London: Longmans, Green, 1866).

17. There are other similar tales that Laboulaye may have known such as Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy's "Le Dauphin" (The Dolphin) in *Suite des contes nouveaux ou des fées à la mode* (1698), Christoph Martin Wieland's long poem "Pervonte" (1778–79), and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's "Hans Dumm" (Simple Hans) in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812).

18. *Contes bleus* (Paris: Furne, Charpentier, 1863): 11.

# TALES

## ■ Smack-Bam, or The Art of Governing Men

In the kingdom of Wild Grass, a happy country, a land blessed by heaven, where men are always right and women never wrong, there lived long ago a king who thought of nothing but the happiness of his kingdom, and who, it is said, never felt bored. Whether he was beloved by his people is doubtful, but what is certain is that the courtiers had little esteem and even less love for their king. For this reason, they had given him the nickname of King Bizarre, the only title by which he is known in history, as can be seen in *The Great Chronicles of the Kingdoms and Principalities of the Worlds Which Have Never Existed*, a learned masterpiece that immortalized the erudition and criticism of the reverend father Dr. Melchisedec de Mentiras y Needad.

Left a widower after a year’s marriage, Bizarre had lavished his entire affection on his son and heir, who was the most handsome child imaginable. His complexion was as fresh as a rose. His marvelous hair fell in golden curls on his shoulders. Add to his clear blue eyes a straight nose, a small mouth, and a dimpled chin, and you have the portrait of a cherub. At eight years of age this young marvel danced enchantingly, rode like a master, and fenced to perfection. His winning smile enchanted everyone, as did the truly royal manner in which he saluted the crowd in passing when he was in a good mood. For this reason, the voice of the people, which is never mistaken, had christened him Prince Charming, and this name clung to him forever.

Charming was as glorious as sunshine, but the sun itself, so people say, has spots, and princes do not disdain to resemble the sun. The young boy dazzled the court with his fine mien. However, there were shadows here and there that did not escape the astute eye of love or envy. Supple, agile, and adroit in all kinds of physical exercises, Charming had a nonchalant disposition. He had come to believe that he could learn and know everything without studying. It is true that governesses, courtiers, and servants had continually repeated to him that work was not made for kings, and that the only thing required of a prince was to learn how to take money from his subjects and fling a little of it to poets, writers, and artists. And he was to do this with a contemptuous hand.

These instructions tickled the vanity of Prince Charming, and at twelve years of age, the handsome boy with precocious obstinacy had steadily refused to learn the alphabet. Three teachers, chosen from the most able and patient instructors—a priest, a philosopher, and a colonel—had attempted, in turn, to overcome his youthful stubbornness, but the priest had wasted his philosophy, the philosopher, his tactics, and the colonel, his Latin. As victor in this battle, Charming listened to nothing but his whims and lived without restraint and discipline. As stubborn as a mule, as irascible as a turkey cock, as dainty as a cat, and as idle as a viper, but an accomplished prince nevertheless, he was the pride of the beautiful country of Wild Grass, and the hope and love of a people that esteemed nothing in their kings but grace and beauty.

## II. Pazza

Although King Bizarre had been brought up at court, he was a man of sense. Therefore, he was far from pleased by Charming's ignorance, and he often asked himself anxiously what would become of his kingdom in the hands of a prince whom the most unctuous of flatterers might easily deceive. But what was he to do? What means could he employ with a child that a wife whom he had worshipped had bequeathed to him on her deathbed? Rather than see his son weep, Bizarre would have given him his crown. Indeed, his affection for his son rendered him powerless. Love is not blind, whatever the poets may say. Yet, how happy we would be if it were so! Actually, love can cause the person who loves to become tormented, despite himself, and eventually to become the slave and accomplice of the ingrate who feels herself beloved.

Every day, after the council, the king spent the evening with the Countess of Castro, an old lady, who had bounced him on her knees when he was an infant, and who alone could recall the sweet memories of his childhood and youth. She was very ugly, and something of a witch, it is said, but the world is so wicked that we must never believe more than half its scandalous rumors. The countess had large features and luxuriant gray hair, and it was easy to see that she had been beautiful earlier in her life.

One day, when Charming had been more unreasonable than usual, the king entered the countess's home with an anxious air, and, seating himself before the card table, began to play a game of patience. It was his way of diverting his thoughts and forgetting his royal duties for a few hours. Scarcely had he arranged sixteen cards in a square when he heaved a deep sigh.

"Countess," he cried, "you see before you the most miserable of fathers and kings. Despite his natural grace, Charming is becoming more willful and vicious every day. Must I leave such an heir after me and entrust the happiness of my people to this crowned fool?"

"Such is life," the countess replied. "It always distributes its gifts with an impartial hand. Stupidity and beauty go hand in hand, and cleverness and ugliness are seldom separated. I have an example of this in my own family. A few days ago a great-grand-niece was sent to me, a child under ten, who has no other relative. She is as brown as a toad, as scraggy as a mutt, as mischievous as a monkey, and as learned as a book. Judge for yourself, sire, here comes my little monster to greet you."

Bizarre turned his head and saw a child who answered in every respect to the countess's description. With a high, round forehead, black, wild-looking eyes, frizzy hair turned back in the Chinese fashion, dull, brown skin, great white teeth, red hands, and long arms, she was anything but a beauty. But the chrysalis gives birth to the butterfly. Wait a few years, and you will see what pretty women bloom from these frightful little girls of ten. The little monster approached the king and curtsied to him with such a serious air that Bizarre could not help laughing, though he felt a strong impulse to do it.

"Who are you?" he asked while holding the child's chin.

"Sire," she answered gravely, "I am Dorma Dolores Rosario Coral Concha Balthazara Melchiora Gaspara y Todos Santos, the daughter of the noble knight Don Pasquale Bartolomeo Francesco de Asiz y—"

"Enough," the king said. "I didn't ask for your family credits. Nor do we intend to attend your baptism or wedding. What are you commonly called?"

“Sire,” she replied, “I am called Pazza.”[1]

“And why are you called Pazza?”

“Because it is not my name.”

“That’s strange,” the king stated.

“No, it’s natural,” the child responded. “My aunt argues that I am too giddy for any saint to wish to have me as her god-daughter, and that’s why she has given me a name that won’t offend anyone in paradise.”

“Well answered, my child. I see that you are not an ordinary girl. The saints in paradise are not always treated with such consideration. Since you know so much, tell me, what is a scholar?”

“A scholar, sire, is one who knows what he says when he speaks, and what he does when he acts.”

“Upon my word,” the king exclaimed, “if my scholars were what you imagine them to be, I’d make the Academy of Sciences my council of state and would give them my kingdom to govern. What is an ignorant man?”

“Sire,” Pazza responded, “there are three kinds of ignorant men: he who knows nothing, he who talks about what he doesn’t know, and he who will learn nothing. All three are fit for nothing but to be burned at the stake or hanged.”

“That is a proverb. Do you know what proverbs are called?”

“Yes, sire. They are called the wisdom of nations.”

“And why are they called such?”

“Because they are foolish. They contradict each other and suit all tastes. Proverbs are like bells that ring out yes or no according to the mood of their listener.”

As soon as she said this, Pazza sprang with both feet from the ground, caught a fly buzzing around the king’s nose, and left King Bizarre astonished. Then she fetched her doll, sat down on the ground, and began to rock the doll in her arms.

“Well, sire,” the countess said, “what do you think of this child?”

“She is much too clever,” the king responded. “She will not live long.”

“Ah, sire!” Pazza exclaimed. “You are not being very polite to my aunt. She is no longer a child.”

“Hush, gypsy!” the old lady smiled. “Don’t you know that nobody lectures kings?”

“Countess,” said Bizarre, “I’ve just been struck by a strange idea which is so strange that I’m afraid to tell it to you. Yet, I have an immense desire to try to realize it. As you know, I can do nothing with my son. Reason has no effect on the stubborn child. So, who knows whether folly would not be more successful? Yet, I think it might work: I want Pazza to become Charming’s teacher. The intractable boy, who rejects all masters, might be defenseless confronted by a child. The only objection is that no one will share my opinion. Everyone at court will be against me.”

“Bah!” the countess replied. “Everyone at court is so stupid that when you think differently, it is proof that you are correct in your judgments.”

## III. The First Lesson

This was how Pazza came to be entrusted with the education of the young prince. There was no official appointment. It was not announced in the *Court Gazette* that the king, with his usual wisdom, had found an unparalleled genius at the first attempt, to whom he had confided the heart and mind of his child. Consequently, the very next morning Charming was sent to the countess’s home and was permitted to play with Pazza. The two children, left alone together, gazed at each other in silence. Pazza, being the bolder, was the first to speak.

“What is your name?” she asked.

“Those who know me call me Your Highness,’’ Charming answered in a piqued tone. “Those who do not know me call me simply My Lord, and everybody says Sir to me. Etiquette requires it.”

“What is etiquette?” asked Pazza.

“I don’t know,’’ Charming replied. “When I want to jump, shout, and roll on the ground, I am told that it is not proper etiquette. Then I keep still and yawn for lack of amusement—that is etiquette.”

“Since we are here to amuse ourselves,” Pazza continued, “etiquette’s not needed. Speak to me as if I were your sister, and I’ll speak to you as if you were my brother. I won’t call you My Lord.”

“But you don’t know me,” Charming declared.

“What does that matter?” Pazza answered. “I shall care for you. What’s better than that? They say that you dance beautifully. Will you please teach me how to dance?”

The ice was broken. Charming took the young girl by the waist and in less than half an hour taught her the latest new polka.

“How well you dance!” he commented. “You’ve understood all the steps right away.”

“It’s because you’re a good teacher,” she replied. “Now it’s my turn to teach you something.”

She took a beautiful picture book and showed him fine buildings, fish, statesmen, parrots, scholars, curious animals, and flowers, all of which greatly amused Charming.

“See,” said Pazza, “here is the explanation of all the pictures. Read it.”

“I don’t know how to read,” Charming replied.

“I’ll teach you. I’ll be your little tutor.”

“No,” replied the stubborn prince. “I don’t wish to read. My tutors bore me.”

“Very well, but I’m not a tutor. See, here is an A, a beautiful great A. Say A.”

“No,” Charming, frowned. “I’ll never say A.”

“Not to please me?”

“No, never. Enough of this. I don’t like people to differ with me.”

“Sir,” said Pazza, “a polite man never refuses a lady anything.”

“I would refuse the devil in petticoats,” the young prince claimed, tossing his head. “I’m tired of you. Leave me alone. I don’t love you any longer. Call me My Lord.”

“My Lord Charming, or my charming lord,” Pazza flushed with anger, “you’ll learn to read, or I’ll know the reason why.”

“I won’t read.”

“Won’t you? One—two—three!”

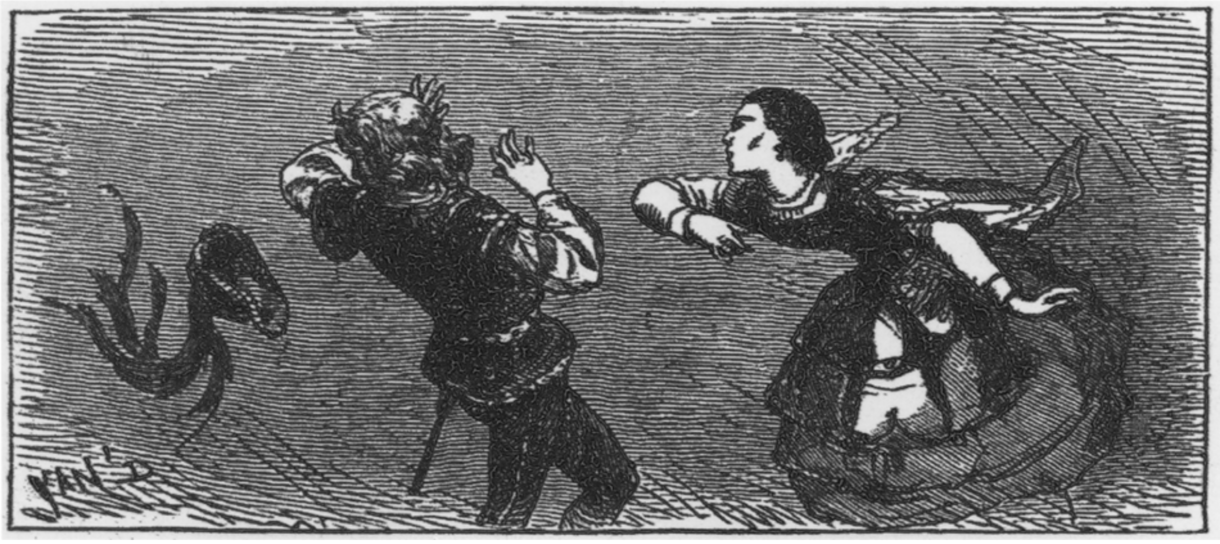
“No! No! No!”

Pazza raised her hand, and suddenly, smack-bam! The king’s son received a smack in the face.

Now, Pazza had been told that she was smart as a whip from her head to the tips of her toes. Unfortunately, she had been stupid enough to believe it because it’s never right to humiliate children. At this first lesson in reading, Charming turned pale and trembled. Blood flooded his cheeks, his eyes filled with tears, and he gazed at his young teacher with a look that stunned her. Then, all at once, he made a great effort and struggled to regain his self-possession.

“Pazza, that is A,” he said with a trembling voice.

And the same day, he learned all the letters of the alphabet at one sitting. By the end of the week he had learned to spell easily, and before the end of the month he read with ease. King Bizarre was delighted. He kissed Pazza on both cheeks. He insisted on always having her with him or with his son and made this child his friend and counselor, scorning all the courtiers.



Prince Charming, still gloomy and silent, learned all that his young tutor could teach him. When he returned to his former preceptors, he astonished them by his intelligence and docility. He soon knew his grammar so well that the priest asked himself one day whether, by chance, these definitions, which he had never understood, had a meaning. To the philosopher’s astonishment, Charming taught him every evening just the opposite of what the priest had taught him in the morning. But, of all his masters, the one to whom he listened with the least repugnance was the colonel. It is true that Bayonet, for that was the colonel’s name, was a skillful strategist, and that he could say, like the ancient poet Terence, with a slight variation, “I am human, and I think that nothing of that which is human is alien to me.”[2]

It was he who initiated Charming into the mysteries of buttons and shoulder straps. It was he who taught his pupil that the noblest study for a prince is the drilling of battalions, and that the groundwork of statesmanship is to have reviews of the military in order to make war, and to make war in order to have reviews. This was not perhaps altogether suitable to Bizarre's idea of the art of government, but he thought he could correct any errors in the future, and, besides, he was delighted so much by Charming's progress that he was unwilling in any way to meddle with the admirable work of an education so long considered hopeless.

"My son," he often said, "never forget that you owe everything to Pazza."

As the king made these remarks, Pazza gazed tenderly at the young man. Despite all her cleverness, she was foolish enough to love him. In contrast, Charming contented himself by coldly replying that gratitude was a princely virtue, and that Pazza would some day learn that her pupil never forgot anything he experienced.

## IV. Pazza's Wedding

One morning, when Prince Charming had reached his seventeenth year, he went looking for King Bizarre, whose health had been declining. He was well aware that Bizarre was very anxious to see his son married before his death.

"Father," he said, "I have pondered your wise words for some time. You gave me life, but Pazza has done still more in wakening my mind and soul. I see only one way of paying the debt of my heart, and that is to marry the woman to whom I am indebted for what I have become. So I've come to ask you for Pazza's hand."

"My dear son," Bizarre answered, "this step does you credit. Pazza is not of royal blood, and under any other circumstances, she's not the one I would have chosen for your wife. Nevertheless, her virtues, her merit, and, above all, the service that she has rendered us make me forget foolish prejudices. Pazza has the soul of a queen. Yes, she will mount the throne with you. In the country of Wild Grass, cleverness and humor are esteemed so highly you will be forgiven for what fools call a misalliance, and for what I call a princely marriage. Happy is he who can choose an intelligent wife, capable of understanding and loving him! Tomorrow your engagement shall be celebrated, and in two years your marriage shall take place.”

However, the marriage occurred more speedily than the king had foreseen. Fifteen months after these memorable words, Bizarre expired of fatigue and exhaustion. He had taken the vocation of king seriously. Indeed, he had fallen a victim to royalty. The old countess and Pazza wept for their friend and benefactor, but they were the only mourners. Without being a bad son, Charming was distracted from his mourning by the cares of the realm, and the court expected everything from the new king and no longer thought about the old king, whose eyes were closed by death.

After honoring his father’s memory with magnificent obsequies, the young king became wholly devoted to love and celebrated his marriage with a splendor that charmed the good people of Wild Grass. Though the taxes were doubled, who could regret money spent for noble purposes? People came from a hundred miles around to gaze at the new king and to admire Pazza, whose growing beauty and air of goodness won all hearts. In due process there were interminable dinners, speeches longer than the dinners, and poems more tedious than the speeches. In a word, it was an incomparable festival, which was talked about for six months after.

One evening, Charming took the hand of his graceful, shy, and blushing bride, and with cold politeness he led her through the corridors of the old castle. All at once, Pazza was frightened when she found herself in a gloomy dungeon with grated windows and huge bars and locks.

“What is this place?” she asked. “It looks like a prison.”

“Yes,” said the new king, with a terrifying look, “it is a prison which you will leave only for the grave.”

“My dear, you’re frightening me.” Pazza smiled. “Am I a criminal without knowing it? Have I deserved your displeasure in any way that you are now threatening me with a dungeon?”

“You have a short memory,” Charming replied. “An insult is written on sand from the giver. But it is engraved on marble and bronze to the receiver.”

“Charming,” replied poor Pazza, who was beginning to be afraid, “you are repeating something from those speeches that tired me so much. Can you find nothing better to say to me today?”

“Miserable wretch!” cried the king. “You apparently no longer remember the smack in the face that you gave me seven years ago, but I haven’t forgotten it. I want you to know that the reason I have wished you for my wife has been only to take hold of your life in my hands, and to make you slowly pay for your crime of high treason.”

“My dear,” Pazza responded fondly, “you may put on your Bluebeard airs, but you won’t frighten me, I assure you. I know you, Charming, and I warn you that if you don’t put an end to this bad joke, I will give you not only another smack in the face, but three, before I forgive you. Now I want you to let me out of here immediately, or I vow that I’ll keep my word.”

“Vow what you like, madam!” cried the king, furious at not intimidating his victim. “I accept your vow, and now I vow, too, on my side, that I’ll never acknowledge you as my wife until I have been fool enough to receive an insult three times that nothing but blood can wash out. He who laughs last, laughs best. Come here, Rachimburg!”

As soon as this frightening name had been pronounced, a jailer with a bushy beard and threatening mien entered the room. He pushed the queen onto a wretched straw-filled mattress and shut and double-locked the iron door. If Pazza wept, it was so quietly that no one heard her. Tired of the silence, Charming departed, with rage in his heart. He was determined to break the pride that resisted him. Vengeance, it is said, is the delight of kings.

Two hours later the countess received a note by a sure hand acquainting her with the sad fate of her niece. How this note reached her is known to me, but I shall not betray the secret. If a charitable jailer is found by chance, he should be treated with great consideration. This species is rare and is daily becoming rarer.

## V. A Terrible Event

The next morning the *Court Gazette* announced that the queen had been overcome by a raging fit of madness on the very night of her wedding, and that there was little hope of saving her. Indeed, almost all the courtiers had observed the queen’s restless air on the evening before, and no one was surprised by her illness. Everyone pitied the young king, who received the expressions of affection lavished on him with a gloomy and constrained mien. He was clearly overwhelmed by grief, but this grief appeared very much lighter after the visit of the countess. The good lady was very sad and had a great desire to see her poor child, but she was so old and found herself so weak and sensitive that she entreated the king to spare her such an emotional spectacle. She threw herself into the arms of Charming, who tenderly embraced her. Then she withdrew, saying that she placed all her hope and trust in the king's love and the skill of the court's chief physician.

She had scarcely left the room when the physician whispered in Charming's ear a few words that called to his face a smile quickly repressed. Once the countess was pacified, there was nothing more to fear. Vengeance was certain.

Doctor Wieduwillst was a great physician. Born in the Country of Dreams, he had left his native land early in his life to seek his fortune in the kingdom of Wild Grass. Indeed, he was too able a man not to find it. In the five years that he had spent at the celebrated University of Lugenmaulberg, medical theory had changed twenty-five times, and, thanks to this solid education, the doctor had a firmness of principle that nothing could shake. He had the frankness and bluntness of a soldier. It was said he swore at times, even with ladies, a rudeness that left him at liberty always to be of the same mind with the more powerful people, and to demand a fee for having no opinion. It was into his incorruptible hands that the poor queen had fallen. She had been imprisoned for three days, and the town was already beginning to talk of something else, when one morning the jailer Rachimburg abruptly entered the king's apartments with a distracted air and threw himself trembling at his feet.

"Sire," he said, "I bring you my head. The queen disappeared during the night."

"What are you saying?" the king exclaimed and turned pale. "This is impossible. The dungeon is barred on all sides."

"Yes," said the jailer, "it is impossible. That's certain. The bars are in their places, the walls are whole, and neither the locks nor the bolts have been disturbed. Nevertheless, there are witches in the world who pass through walls without moving a stone. Who knows but the prisoner may be one of them? Maybe she is one of them?"

The king sent for the doctor, who was a strong-minded man and did not believe in witches. He tapped the walls, shook the bars, and cross-examined the jailer, but all in vain. Trustworthy men were sent everywhere in the city, and spies were ordered to monitor the countess, whom the doctor suspected, but again, it was all in vain, and after a week the search was abandoned. Rachimburg lost his position as jailer, but since he knew the royal secret, he was still needed, and since he longed to avenge himself, he was appointed the warden of the royal castle.

Furious at his bad luck, Rachimburg supervised everything so strictly that in less than three days he arrested Wieduwillst himself half a dozen times and relieved him of all suspicion. At the end of a week some fishermen brought the queen’s robe and mantle to the court. These sad remains had been washed ashore by the waves and were covered with sand and sea foam. Nobody doubted but that the poor mad woman had drowned herself, especially when the courtiers saw the king’s grief and the countess’s tears.

Now the council was assembled, and the councilors decided with a unanimous vote that the queen was legally dead, and that the king was legally a widower. Consequently, in the interest of the people, the council entreated His Majesty to avoid a painful mourning period and to wed again as soon as possible in order to strengthen the dynasty. This decision was transmitted by Wieduwillst, the chief physician, to the king and president of the royal council, who made such a touching speech that the whole court burst into tears, and Charming threw himself into the doctor’s arms, calling him his cruel friend.

Needless to say, all this lamenting during the funeral of a queen was magnificent. In the kingdom of Wild Grass everything serves as a pretext for ceremony. The pageant was worthy of admiration, but the most admirable thing in it was the attitude of the young ladies of the court. Every one of them looked at Charming, who was handsomer than ever in his mourning dress. Everyone wept with one eye in honor of the queen and smiled with the other to attract the king. Ah! Had photography only been invented, what portraits would antiquity have transmitted to us—what models for our painters! These good people still had passionate feelings. Their mobile faces were animated by love, hatred, and anger. Today we are all so virtuous and prudent that we wear the same dress, the same hat, and the same expression. Civilization is the triumph of morality and the ruin of art.

After the account of the funeral ceremonies, which, according to etiquette, filled six columns, the *Court Gazette* announced the dress code for the second mourning—blue and pink, which are the mourning colors in the kingdom of Wild Grass. The courtiers were required to remain in deep affliction for three weeks and to be comforted by degrees during the three weeks following. However, since Carnival occurred during the period of the second mourning, and since respect was bad for business, the king and his council decided to hold a masked ball at the palace. Tailors and dressmakers immediately set to work. Invitations were solicited by great and small, and men began to plot and intrigue to acquire them as if the fate of the monarchy had been in question. Such was the solemn manner that they mourned for poor Pazza.

## VI. The Masked Ball

At last the great day, so impatiently expected, arrived. For six weeks the good people of Wild Grass had been in a fever of excitement. Nothing more was heard of ministers, senators, generals, magistrates, princesses, duchesses, and citizens. For twenty miles around now, clowns, harlequins, Punchinellos, gypsies, Columbines, and follies alone were to be seen. Politics were silenced, or, rather, the nation was divided into two great parties, the conservatives, who went to the ball, and the opposition, who stayed at home.

If the official *Gazette* is to be believed, the splendor of the festival outshone all others past and those to come. The ball was held in the midst of the gardens in a magnificently decorated rotunda. A winding walk, shaded by elms and dimly illuminated by alabaster lamps, led to a hall resplendent with gold and flowers, verdure, and lights. The orchestra, half concealed in the foliage, played the most entrancing music, alternating between passionate and cheerful. Add to this the richness of the costumes, the brilliancy of the diamonds, the piquancy of the masks, and the charm of intrigue, and it was easy to imagine that the scene would have needed the soul of an ancient stoic to resist the intoxication of pleasure.

Yet, Charming was not amused. Concealed under a blue domino costume, with his face entirely masked, he had spoken with the most elegant and sprightly women and had lavishly displayed his wit and grace.

However, he had met with nothing but indifference and coldness. His partners scarcely listened to him, answered with a yawn, and hurried to leave him.

All eyes were fixed on a man dressed in a black domino costume with pink rosettes. He moved casually among the dancers and accepted with the air of a sultan compliments and smiles that everyone bestowed on him. This domino figure was the Lord Wieduwillst, the great friend of the king, but an even greater friend of himself. In an unguarded moment the doctor had spoken that morning with two ladies under the seal of secrecy that the king would be wearing pink rosettes on a black domino costume. Was it his fault if the ladies had not been able to keep the secret, or the king had changed his mind?

While the doctor was enjoying the attention despite himself—and indeed, his triumph had been unexpected—Charming seated himself in a corner of the hall and buried his face in his hands. Alone amid the crowd, he abandoned himself to reflection, and Pazza's image rose before him. He had no reproaches to make himself. His vengeance had been just; yet, he felt an indescribable remorse. Poor Pazza! No doubt she had been guilty, but at least she had loved him. She had understood him and listened to him. Her eyes had always sparkled with joy. How different from all those fools who could not recognize a king's wit under a domino costume.

All of a sudden, just as he stood up to leave the hall, he perceived a mask across the hall that had also left the crowd and seemed lost in contemplation. A half-open domino costume disclosed a gypsy's dress and a pair of slippers with buckles that contained two feet smaller than those of Cinderella. The king approached the stranger and saw a pair of large black eyes through the velvet mask. She had a melancholy gaze that surprised and charmed him.

"Beautiful mask," he said, "your place isn't here. Why aren't you among the eager and curious crowd that has gathered around the king to conquer his smile and heart? Don't you know that you can win a crown there?"

"I make no pretensions to aspire to one," she answered in a grave but sweet voice. "In this game of chance, one runs the risk of mistaking the servant for the king. I am too proud to expose myself to such a hazard."

"But if I show you the king?"

“What could I say to him?” the stranger replied. “I don’t have the right to blame him without offense, or to praise him without flattery.”

“You think very badly of him, then?”

“No, a little evil and much good, but what does it matter?”

And, as she opened her fan, the stranger returned to her reverie. This indifference surprised Charming. He addressed her with warmth, and she replied coldly. He pleaded with her so urgently to listen to him that she finally consented to do so, but not in the ballroom, where the heat was overpowering and the curiosity, indiscreet. So they went to the long elm walk, where a few people were promenading, seeking silence and fresh air. The night was advancing, and the gypsy had already spoken several times about leaving the ball to the great regret of the king, who vainly entreated her to unmask. However, the stranger did not acquiesce.

“You drive me to despair,” the king remarked, and yet, he was strangely drawn to this mysterious figure. “Why this cruel silence?”

“Because I know you, my lord,” the stranger replied with emotion. “Your voice, which touches my heart, and your words all tell me who you are. Let me go, Sir Charming.”

“No, madam,” cried the king, fascinated by so much intelligence, “you alone have recognized me. You alone have understood me. My heart and kingdom belong to you. Take off that odious mask. We shall return to the ballroom instantly, and I shall present you to the ignorant crowd as the woman I have had the happiness not to displease. Say but one word, and all my people will be at your feet.”

“My lord,” the stranger replied sadly, “permit me to refuse an offer that does me honor. I shall always remember this moment with fondness. I am ambitious, I confess. There was a time when I would have been proud to share your throne and name, but, above all things, I am a woman and place all my happiness in love. I will not have a divided heart, even if my rival is only a memory. I am jealous even of the past.”

“I have never loved anyone!” the king exclaimed with a vehemence that stunned the stranger. “There is a mystery concerning my marriage that I can reveal only to my wife, but I swear to you that I have never given away my heart. I love now for the first time.”

“Show me your hand,” the gypsy said as she approached the lamp, “and let me see whether you have told the truth.”

Charming extended his hand with assurance, while the gypsy studied the lines and sighed. “You are right, my lord,” she said. “You have never loved. But this does not satisfy my jealousy. Another woman has loved you before me. These sacred bonds are not broken by death. The queen still loves you, and you belong to her. To accept a heart no longer at your disposal would be sacrilegious and criminal of me. Farewell.”

“Madam,” the king said with an uncertain voice, “you don’t know how much you are causing me to suffer. There are things that I would gladly bury in eternal silence, but which you force me to reveal. The queen never loved me. Ambition alone dictated her behavior.”

“That is not so,” the stranger replied as she let go of the king’s hand. “The queen loved you.”

“No, madam,” Charming insisted. “My father and I were the victims of an abominable intrigue.”

“Enough!” the stranger exclaimed. Her hands trembled and fingers twitched in a strange manner. “Respect the dead. Don’t slander them.”

“Madam,” the king responded, “I assure you, and no one has ever doubted my word, that the queen never loved me. She was a wicked woman. Ah! How willful, violent, and jealous!”

“Even if she was jealous, she loved you,” interrupted the mask. “Find the evidence that has at least a shadow of probability. Don’t accuse a heart that was wholly yours.”

“So far from loving me,” the king said excitedly, “she dared tell me to my face the very night of my marriage that she had married me only for my crown.”

“That is not true,” the gypsy responded and raised her hand.

“I swear it,” Charming declared.

“You lie!” the stranger exploded, and all at once, she smacked the king in his face and made him wince. After the blow was repeated, the stranger fled, while Charming stepped backward. He was furious and attempted to pull out the hilt of his sword, but men don’t go to balls armed for war. The sole weapon he found was a knot of ribbons. He ran after his offender, but he had no idea which way she had fled. So, Charming lost himself twenty times in the labyrinth. He encountered nobody but peaceful people dressed in domino costumes, walking in couples and scarcely glancing at him as he passed.

Breathless, distracted, and desperate, he returned to the ballroom, where he was convinced that the stranger had taken refuge. But how was he to find her? A brilliant idea crossed the king's mind. He would order everyone to unmask, and then he would doubtless recognize the gypsy, who would be confused by the king's presence and betrayed by her own agitation. He instantly leaped on a chair and exclaimed in a loud voice that astonished everyone at the ball.

"Ladies and gentlemen, day is approaching and pleasure is diminishing. Let us revive mirth by a new caprice. Off with the masks! I shall set the example. Let all who love me, do as I do!"

He threw off his domino costume, raised his mask, and appeared in the richest and most elegant Spanish suit ever worn by a king. There was a general outcry. At first all eyes turned toward Charming, then toward the man in the black domino costume with pink rosettes, who had disappeared as fast as possible with false modesty. Everyone unmasked. The ladies gathered around the king, who, it was remarked, had a strong preference for women in a gypsy costume. Young or old, all the gypsies received his attention. He took them by the hand and gazed at them with an air that made all the other masks ready to burst with envy. Then he made a sign to the orchestra. The dance began again, and the king disappeared. He rushed again to the elm walk in search of the traitor who had insulted him, doubtless led by vengeance. His blood boiled in his veins. He wandered at random, stopping for short moments, looking and listening in all directions. At the faintest gleam of light he sprang forward through the foliage. He was like a madman, laughing and weeping at the same time as though he could not control himself. When he entered an alley, he encountered Rachimburg racing toward him and trembling with an air of terror.

"Sire," he muttered in a mysterious voice, "has Your Majesty seen it?"

"Seen what?" the king asked.

"The ghost! It passed right by me. I am a lost man! I shall die tomorrow."

"What ghost?" Charming asked. "What fool's tale are you telling me?"

"A ghost—a domino with flashing eyes that threw me on my knees and smacked my face twice."

"It's her!" cried the king. "It's her! Why did you let her go?"

"Your Majesty, I didn't have my club with me, but if ever I meet her again, I'll knock her down."

"Do no such thing!" the king responded. "If she ever returns, you're to follow her and find out where she lives. Do not frighten her! Follow her and discover her dwelling. But where is she? Which way did she go? Show me! If I find her, your fortune is made."

"Sire," the honest jailer said as he looked at the moon, "if the ghost is anywhere, it must be up there. I saw it as plainly as I see Your Majesty, vanishing in the mist. But, before soaring into the sky, it gave me a message for Your Majesty."

"What? Tell me immediately!"

"Sire, its words were terrible. I can never dare repeat them to Your Majesty."

"Speak, I order you!"

"Sire, the ghost said, in a grave voice, 'Tell the king that if he ever marries again, he is a dead man. The loved one will return.' "

"Here," said the king, whose eyes shone with a strange luster, "take my purse. From this moment onward, you will be my personal servant. I appoint you my first valet and count on your devotion and prudence. Let this affair remain a secret between us."

"That makes two," Rachimburg mumbled as he departed with a firm step, like a man who does not allow himself to be overcome by fear or dazzled by good fortune. He was a strong-minded man.

The next morning the *Court Gazette* contained the following lines, in the form of a letter without signature and in the unofficial part of the paper:

"A rumor has been spread that the king is thinking of marrying again. The king knows what he owes to his people and is always ready to sacrifice himself for the happiness of his subjects. But the people of Wild Grass have too much delicacy not to respect a recent affliction. The king's whole thoughts are fixed on his beloved wife. He hopes for consolation in time which as yet he has not found."

This note threw the court and town in excitement. The young ladies thought the king's scruples were exaggerated. More than one mother shrugged her shoulders and said that the king had vulgar prejudices worthy only of the common people, but at night there was strife in every well-ordered household. There was not a wife of any pretensions to aristocratic birth who did not quarrel with her unworthy spouse and force him to admit that there was but one heart capable of love, and but one faithful husband in the whole kingdom, namely, His Majesty.

## VII. Two Consultations

After so much excitement, the king was overcome by a cruel fit of boredom. To divert himself, he tried to amuse himself in different ways: he hunted, he presided over his council, he went to the theater and the opera, he gave grand receptions for the courtiers and their wives, he read a Carthaginian novel, and he reviewed the troops half a dozen times. However, everything was in vain. An inexorable memory, an ever-present image left him no rest or peace. The gypsy haunted him even in his dreams. He saw her. He talked to her, and she listened to him, but, by some unaccountable fatality, as soon as she raised her mask, Pazza’s pale, sad face always appeared. The doctor was the only confidant to whom Charming could confess his remorse, but when Wieduwillst heard his words, he burst into laughter.

“The effect of habit, sire,” he said. “Gain time, multiply impressions, and all will wear off.”

To procure some excitement for the king and to drive away sorrow by a bold diversion, the doctor dined every evening with His Majesty and poured out intoxication and oblivion with a liberal hand. Wieduwillst did not spare himself, but wine had little effect on his strong brain. He would have defied Bacchus and Silenus together with Charming. The young king, by turns noisy and quiet, plunged into the extremes of joy and sadness, always restless and never happy. Meanwhile, Wieduwillst was calm and smiling and influenced Charming’s thoughts. Out of sheer goodness of heart, Wieduwillst took the burden of government on his shoulders.

He had already taken command of the police, the courts, and the finances through three decrees. The doctor understood all the advantages of centralization very well. The way in which he administered the taxes relieved him from all personal anxiety for the future. The courts punished those who clamored too loudly; the police silenced those who whispered too much. Nevertheless, in spite of the ingenuity of these political schemes, the people, always ungrateful, did not appreciate their happiness. The inhabitants of Wild Grass loved to complain, and now this pleasure was spoiled for them. King Bizarre's name continued to be in all their hearts, and everyone missed the good old times when they shouted over the rooftops that they had been gagged.

The doctor was ambitious. He felt he was born to be a prime minister. Every morning some new ordinance made the people believe that the king was nothing and the minister, everything. Charming was the only one who did not perceive his nothingness. Shut up in his palace and dying of ennui, he had as his sole companion a page assigned to him by the prime minister on Rachimburg's recommendation. Playful, chattering, and indiscreet, a good musician and capital card-player, Tonto, for that was the page's name, amused the king by his pranks. He pleased the prime minister no less, but this was due to other virtues. Devoted to his benefactor, the good-natured page innocently informed the doctor of the most trifling words uttered by Charming. Moreover, this was an especially easy task because the king was constantly dreaming and never spoke. It is a fine thing to have the advantages of power, but the more you taste, the more you want to eat, even with doctors and ministers.

The ambitious doctor began to desire both the honors and splendor of royalty. Charming's best friend did not once think of dethroning him. People sometimes have foolish prejudices and cling to old habits, but nothing was easier than to frighten a sick king and send him far away in search of a cure that would be long in coming, while in his absence the doctor would reign as his proxy.

Charming was young. He still clung to life, and, moreover, how could he resist the tender care and compassion of the good doctor? The three most renowned physicians of the faculty met one evening in consultation at the palace: tall Tristram, chubby Jocundus, and tiny Guilleret, three celebrated men. Indeed, they were three geniuses who had made their fortune, each with one idea, which was why they had never had any more. After the king had been cross-questioned, examined, handled, and turned round again and again, tall Tristram spoke first, in a rough voice.

"Sire," he said, "you must be bled like a peasant and live without any exertion whatsoever. Your disease is a deficiency of blood, a constitutional atony. Nothing but a journey to the Clear Waters can cure you. Go quickly, or you are a dead man. You have my opinion."

“Sire,” chubby Jocundus declared, “I fully share the admirable opinion of my dear professional brother. You are suffering from superabundant vitality. Your disease is a constitutional plethora. Go, drink the Clear Waters, and you will get well again. You have my opinion.”

“Sire,” tiny Guilleret added, “the diagnosis of my seniors fills me with admiration. I bow before their learning. Like them, I believe that you are suffering from disorder of the sympathetic nerves. Your disease is a constitutional nervousness. Drink the Clear Waters. Go quickly, or you are a dead man. You have my opinion.”

Their unanimous opinion was drawn up and immediately carried to the *Court Gazette* by Tonto, and the three doctors rose, bowed to the minister and the king, shook hands with each other, and went downstairs quarreling or laughing, I don’t know which. The chronicle is almost illegible, owing to a large blotch of ink in this place.

After the three physicians had gone, Wieduwillst read the opinion, deliberated deeply, and looked at the king, who had dined a little better this evening, even more than usual. Yet, he had not once listened to the doctors. Instead, he sat gazing around him with bloodshot eyes.

“Sire,” Wieduwillst remarked, “it is the unanimous opinion of these gentlemen that, if you wish to be cured, you must go to the Clear Waters and abandon the affairs of state. Such a resolution appears to me unworthy of Your Royal Majesty. A great king should sacrifice himself for his people, and—”

“Enough,” the king interrupted him, “spare me this worn-out moralizing, and come to the point. You wish me to go, my friend. Of course, you are dying for me to do so in my own interest. So, draw up a decree placing the regency in your hands, and I shall sign it.”

“Sire, the decree is here, in your portfolio. A good minister always has papers drawn up to suit whatever circumstances may arise. He never knows what might happen.”

Charming took the pen, carelessly signed the decree without reading it, and handed it to the minister, who smiled as he approached to receive it. Then, Charming whimsically drew back the paper and read it.

“What?” he remarked. “No statement of reasons? Nothing to assure my people of the kindness I bear them! Doctor, you are too modest. Tomorrow this decree will be in the *Gazette* with a statement from the hand of your friend and master. Good night. These gentlemen have exhausted me."

The doctor went out with a light step, erect brow, and sparkling eyes, prouder and more insolent than ever. Charming sank again into his reverie, thinking that, despite everything, he was not the unhappiest of kings, and he thanked heaven for having given him such a good friend.

All at once, the strangest little doctor ever seen anywhere burst into the king's apartment unannounced. He wore a wig with long white curls; his snow-white beard fell on his chest; and his eyes were so bright and youthful that it seemed as though they must have come into the world sixty years after the rest of his body.

"Where are those idiots?" he cried with a shrill voice, striking the floor with his cane. "Where are those ignorant fellows, those pedants, those ill-bred men who didn't wait for me? Ah! So you are the patient," he said to the stupefied king. "That's good. Stick out your tongue. Quick! I'm in a hurry."

"Who are you?" the king asked.

"I am Doctor Wahrheit, the greatest doctor in the world, as you will soon see, in spite of my modesty. Ask Wieduwillst, my pupil, who sent for me from the Country of Dreams. I cure everybody, even those who are not ill. Stick out your tongue. That's right. Where are the reports of the doctors? Very well. Atony—*He's an ass!* Plethora—*He's a greater ass!* Nervousness—*He's the greatest ass*! Drink the Clear Waters—*They are all asses*! Do you know what your disease is? It is sorrow, and even worse."

"Is this what you see?" Charming asked, terrified.

"Yes, my son, it is written on your tongue. But I will cure you. Everything will be finished by tomorrow noon."

"Tomorrow!" the king remarked. "All my treasures—"

"Be quiet, my son! What portfolio is that?—The minister's? Good. Sign these three papers for me."

"They are blank decrees," the king noted. "What do you want to do with them?"

"They are my prescriptions. *Contraria contrarils curantur*. Sign. Well done, my son. Be obedient, and tomorrow noon you will be as cheerful as a lark. First prescription: *Si vis pacem, para pacem.* If you would live at peace, appear at peace. I am eliminating six regiments. Second prescription: A penny in a peasant’s pocket is worth twenty in the king’s treasury. I am eliminating one fourth of the taxes. Third prescription: Liberty is like the sunshine. It is the happiness and fortune of the poor. I shall throw open the political prisons and dismantle the debtors’ prisons. You are laughing, my son. It is a good sign when a patient laughs at his doctor.”

“Yes,” Charming said. “I am laughing to think of Wiedu-willst’s face tomorrow when he reads these prescriptions in the *Court Gazette*. Enough of these whims, you buffoon of a doctor! Give me back the papers, and let’s put an end to this farce.”

“What is this?” the little man said and picked up the decree of the regency. “God forgive me! It is an abdication. What are you thinking of doing, Charming? What? The inheritance bequeathed to you by your fathers, the people entrusted to you by God, your name, your honor, will you throw all these at the feet of an opportunist? Will you let yourself be dethroned and duped by a deceiver? Impossible!! It doesn’t suit me! I oppose it! Are you listening?”

“What kind of insolent fellow addresses his king in this way?” Charming responded.

“Politeness is not determined by words. Charming, are you mad? Are you dreaming? Are you heartless?”

“This is too much!” cried the king. “Get out of here, you miserable wretch, or I’ll throw you out of the window.’’

“Leave here?” the little doctor responded in a shrill voice. “No, not until I have destroyed this mad and stupid document. Watch! I’m tearing your abdication in pieces and trampling it!”

Charming grabbed hold of the madman and called his guards. No one answered. The little man struggled with surprising strength. He threw the lamp on the ground with his foot, but despite the darkness, the king held on to the sorcerer, who felt his strength failing.

“Let me go!” he uttered. “For heaven’s sake, let me go! You don’t know what you are doing! You are breaking my arm!”

His words and pleas were useless. Suddenly a shower of smacks, dealt by a strong hand, fell on the king’s face. Taken by surprise, Charming had to let go of his hold and turned to attack his invisible enemy. He found nothing but empty space, and, staggering in the darkness, he cried loudly for help that did not come. Such a thing could not have happened in a minister’s house. Kings are always the last to be guarded.

## VIII. The End of a Dream

At last, a door opened, and Rachimburg entered to undress the king according to etiquette. The faithful servant appeared greatly vexed to find him without a light and groping along the wall.

“Where is that infernal doctor?” Charming asked, foaming with rage.

“It’s more than an hour, sire, since His Excellency left the palace.”

“Who’s talking about Wieduwillst?” the king cried. “Which way did the villain who just insulted me go?”

Rachimburg looked at the king with a contrite air, raised his eyes to heaven, and sighed.

“A man went out the door that leads to your rooms,” Charming said. “How did he enter, and where has he fled?”

“Sire,” Rachimburg replied, “I have neither left my post nor have I seen anyone.”

“I tell you that a man was in this room a moment ago.”

“Sire, Your Majesty is never mistaken. If a man was in this room, he is still here unless he has flown through the window, or Your Majesty has been dreaming.”

“Fool, do I look like a man who has been dreaming? Did I knock over this lamp? Did I tear these papers?”

“Sire, I am nothing but a worm on this earth. God forbid that I should contradict my sovereign. Your Majesty did not hire me to tell him lies. But this year strange dreams are an epidemic. No one knows what he may do or suffer in his sleep. Only just now I was overtaken with sleep in spite of myself, and if I were not sure that I was dreaming, I would declare that an invisible hand smacked my face twice, and because of this I woke up startled.”

“It was the ghost!” the king said.

“Your Majesty is right,” replied Rachimburg. “I am nothing but a simpleton. It was the ghost.”

“And I didn’t recognize her!” Charming continued. “Nevertheless, it was her voice and air. What does this mean? Is it a new insult? Is it a warning from heaven? Does some danger threaten me? No matter, I shall remain in my kingdom. My friend, not a word about this to anyone. Take this purse, and keep the secret.”

“That makes the third,” the faithful Rachimburg mumbled as he undressed the king with a zeal and attention that made His Majesty smile several times. So many emotions one after another banished sleep. It was daybreak before the king dozed, and broad daylight before he awoke. In the first moment between sleeping and waking, Charming thought he heard a strange noise—bells ringing, cannons firing, and three or four bands of music playing, each with a different air. He was not mistaken. There was an infernal hubbub. The king rang, and Rachimburg entered, carrying a bouquet of flowers.

“Sire,” he asked, “will His Majesty permit the humblest of his servants to be the first to express the universal joy to him? Your people are intoxicated with love and gratitude. They thank you for diminishing the taxes, opening the prisons, and reducing the army! Sire, you are the greatest king in the world. Never has the world seen a ruler like you. Show yourself at the balcony. Answer their cries of ‘Hurrah for the king!’ Smile on the people who bless you.”

Rachimburg could not finish. Tears choked his voice. He attempted to wipe his eyes, but, in his excitement, he took the *Gazette* from his pocket instead of a handkerchief and began to kiss it like a madman. Charming took the journal and vainly attempted to collect his ideas while dressing. By what chance had the insane prescriptions become ordinances and been published in the official journal? Who had sent them? Why didn’t Wieduwillst make his appearance? The king wished to contemplate, consult, and question, but the people were outside beneath the windows of the palace, and they were too impatient to wait. As soon as the king appeared in the balcony, he was greeted with enthusiastic shouts, which, despite everything, thrilled his heart. Men tossed their caps in the air; women waved their handkerchiefs; mothers lifted up their children and made them stretch their innocent hands to heaven and repeat, “Hurrah for the king!” The guns of the palace guards were decked with flowers. The drums beat, and the swords of the officers flashed in the sun. It was a scene of delirious joy. Charming was touched by the general emotion. He wept without exactly knowing why. At that instant the clock struck noon. The ghost was right—the king was cured!

After the crowd, it was the turn of the officers of the state, who came with the ministers at their head to congratulate and thank the king for having understood the wishes of his faithful councilors so well. Only one person was missing, namely, Wieduwillst. No one knew where he had hidden his rage and disgust. A mysterious note received by him that morning had caused his flight; yet, this note contained only the words "The king knows about everything!"

Who had written this fatal letter? Not the king. He was the only person in the palace who thought of the minister and wondered at not seeing him by his side. All at once, Tonto entered, pale and haggard. He ran to the king and gave him a letter that an officer had brought at full gallop. The governor of the province, General Bayonet, sent terrible news. The six disbanded regiments had mutinied and were now headed by Wieduwillst. The rebels had proclaimed the downfall of the king, whom they accused of abominable crimes, especially of the murder of the queen. They were numerous and under excellent command. At that very moment they were approaching the city, defended only by a few dubious and disaffected regiments.

Bayonet implored the king to come instantly and take charge. If he waited an hour, all would be lost. Led by Tonto and Rachimburg, the king secretly left the palace, followed by a few officers. A proclamation, pasted on all the walls of the city and at every corner of the streets, declared that there was no truth to the rumors spread by a few malicious individuals, and that the army had never been more devoted or faithful. Soon after this proclamation had been posted, there was universal panic. Stocks fell fifty percent in half an hour and did not rise again till unofficial news arrived that the king had been well received at headquarters.

## IX. Heroic Remedies for Great Evils

The news was false. The king had been received with great coldness. It was his own fault. Sad, despondent, and dreamy, Charming could not find one cheerful remark to make to the soldiers nor a word of encouragement for the officers. He entered the general’s tent and fell into a chair. Tonto was hardly less disheartened.

“Sire,” said Bayonet, “permit me to speak to you with the frankness of a soldier and the freedom of an old friend. The army is murmuring and hesitating. We must secure everything, or all is lost. The enemy is in sight, and we must attack him. Five minutes sometimes decide the fate of empires. This is the case with us now. Don’t wait until it is too late!”

“Very well,” the king declared. “To horse! I shall be with you instantly.”

Left alone with Tonto and Rachimburg, the king exclaimed in despair, “My good friends, I want you to leave a master who can do no more for you. My miserable life is not worth a struggle. Betrayed by a friend who has treacherously turned on me, I recognize in my misfortune the hand of an avenging God. It is just punishment for my crime. I killed the queen in my stupid vengeance. The hour has come to pay for my crime, and I am ready.”

“Sire,” Tonto said, trying to smile, “shake off these sad thoughts. If the queen were here, she would tell you to defend yourself. Believe me,” he added, twisting his budding mustache, “I am acquainted with women! Were they dead, they would still like to be avenged. Besides, you didn’t kill the queen, and perhaps she is not as dead as you imagine.”

“What are you saying?” exclaimed the king. “You are losing your mind!”

“I say that there are women who die expressly to enrage their husbands. Why shouldn’t there be those who would rise from the dead to enrage them still more? Leave the dead, and think of the living who love you. You are a king. Fight like a king, and, if necessary, fall like a king.”

“Sire,” said Bayonet, who entered with sword in hand, “time presses.”

“General, to horse!” Tonto cried. “Let us go.”

Bayonet left the room to give the necessary orders. When he was gone, Charming looked at Tonto and said, “No, I will not go. I don’t understand my feelings. I abhor myself, and I am not afraid of death. I am going to kill myself. Nevertheless, I will not fight.”

“Sire,” said Tonto, “in heaven’s name, summon your courage! To horse! Great God!” he exclaimed, wringing his hands. “The king will not listen to me. We are lost. Come!” he said and grabbed Charming’s cloak. “Get up, sire. To horse, unhappy king! Save your kingdom! Save your people! Save all who love you. Coward! Look at me! I am nothing but a boy, yet I am about to die for you. Fight! Do not disgrace yourself! If you don’t get up, I’ll insult you, I, your servant. You are a coward! Do you hear me? A coward!”

And all of a sudden, the insolent page smacked the king’s face.

“Thunder and lightning!” cried Charming, drawing his sword. “Before dying I shall have the pleasure of punishing that wretched boy!”

But the page had left the tent. He had jumped on his horse with one leap and galloped toward the enemy, sword in hand, crying, “The king! My friend—the king! Sound the trumpets! Forward!”

Charming was furious, and he spurred his horse in pursuit of the page. Like a bull at the sight of a red flag, he rushed forward with his head lowered, caring for neither death nor danger. Bayonet dashed after the king, and the army followed the general. It was the finest cavalry charge ever known in history. The noise of the squadrons shook the ground like thunder, and the enemy was taken by surprise so that the hostile soldiers scarcely had time to form a line of battle.

One man, however, had recognized the king, and it was the notorious Dr. Wieduwillst. Meanwhile, Charming was alone, wholly absorbed by his feelings of vengeance. He saw nothing but the page he was pursuing. This allowed the treacherous doctor to throw himself at the king, sword in hand, and he would have slain him with one stroke if Tonto had not plunged his spurs into the flanks of his horse and made the animal rear and fall on Wieduwillst. The page received the blow intended for his master. Then he threw his arms up and fell with a loud cry. At least his fall was avenged, for the king stuck his sword into the throat of the treacherous physician and pulled it out, dripping with blood, not without pleasure. Man is decidedly the king of wild beasts.

The traitor’s death decided the outcome of the day. The royal army, electrified by the heroism of its leader, soon dispersed the straggling battalions. Since they no longer had any hope, the rebels pleaded for pardon, which the happy and merciful king granted.

An hour after leaving the camp where he had wished to die, Charming returned in triumph, bringing with him conquerors and conquered, all blended in the same ranks—soldiers loudly protesting their loyalty and others overpowering them with their enthusiasm. Nothing stirs loyalty so much as a little treason.

## X. In Which We See That It Is Wrong to Judge According to Appearances and That Tonto Was Not Tonto

The king entered his tent to rest a moment, when the sight of Rachimburg reminded him of Tonto.

“Is the page dead?” he asked.

“No, sire,” Rachimburg replied. “Unfortunately for him, he is still living and is hopeless. I ordered him to be carried to the residence of his aunt, the Countess de Castro, which is near here.”

“Is he the countess’s nephew?” the king inquired. “I was never told anything about it.”

“Your Majesty has forgotten it,” Rachimburg responded quietly. “The poor boy has been fatally wounded in the shoulder. He cannot recover from the wound. It would make him extremely happy if he would see Your Majesty before he dies.”

“Very well,” the king answered. “Take me to him.”

On his arrival at the castle Charming was met by the countess, who conducted him to a dark room. Pale and bleeding, the page was stretched out on a couch. Despite his poor condition, he had strength enough to raise his head and welcome the king.

“What a miracle!” Charming exclaimed. “This is the strangest wound that I’ve ever seen in my life. One side of Tonto’s mustache is gone!”

“Sire,” the countess remarked, “the blade of the sword probably sliced off one side. Nothing is as capricious as sword wounds, as everyone knows.”

“How strange!” cried the king. “On one side it is Tonto, my page, the insolent boy, and on the other it is—no, if I’m not mistaken—it is you, my good angel and my savior! It is you, my poor Pazza!”

Upon saying this, he fell on his knees and seized her hand, which lay on the bedspread.

“Sire,” Pazza said, “my days are numbered, but before dying—”

“No, no, Pazza, you shall not die,” the king was in tears.

“Before dying,” she added, casting down her eyes, “I hope that Your Majesty will forgive me for smacking your face this morning. I did this in indiscreet zeal—”

“Enough,” the king interrupted. “I forgive you. After all, a throne and honor were well worth what I received.”

“Alas!” Pazza replied. “That’s not all.”

“What?” Charming exclaimed. “Is there anything more?’

“Oh, sire, what have you done?” the countess cried. “My child is dying!”

“My Pazza, you must not die!” the king declared. “Speak and be certain that I forgive all you’ve done in advance. Alas! It is I who has need of forgiveness.”

“Sire, the little doctor who took the liberty of smacking Your Majesty’s face—”

“Was it you who sent him?” Charming asked with a frown.

“No, sire, it was I. Ah! There’s nothing I would have done to save my king! It was I who took the liberty of smacking your face to save Your Majesty from the treacherous rogues who surrounded you—”

“Enough,” Charming replied. “I forgive you, though the lesson was a harsh one.”

“Alas! That’s not all,” Pazza said.

“What, more?!” the king cried and stood up.

“Oh, aunt, I am dying!” Pazza cried and fainted.

However, thanks to the tender care she received, she regained consciousness. Then she turned her languid eyes toward the king and said, “Sire, the gypsy girl at the masked ball, who dared to smack your face—”

“Was it you, Pazza?” Charming asked. “Oh, I forgive you for that. I thoroughly deserved it. How could I doubt you, you who are sincerity itself? But, now that I think of it, do you remember the rash vow that you made on the night of our marriage? You have kept your promise. Now, it is time for me to keep mine. Pazza, please hurry and recover so that you can return to the desolate palace. There’s been no happiness there ever since you fled.”

“I have one last favor to ask of Your Majesty,” Pazza responded. “Rachimburg was the witness this morning of a scene for which I blush, and which must be kept secret from everyone, I commend this faithful servant to your goodness.”

“Rachimburg,” said the king, “take this purse, and keep the secret under penalty of your head.”

“That makes the fourth,” Rachimburg whispered to himself. “My fortune is made.”

Some moments later, Pazza was asleep.

“Do you think that she will recover?” Charming anxiously asked the countess.

“Bah!” the old lady responded. “No matter how ill a woman may be, happiness will bring her back from the brink of the grave. Kiss the queen, my nephew. It will do her more good than all the doctors in the world.”

So, Charming stooped and kissed the sleeping Pazza. An angelic smile stole over her features. Upon seeing this, Charming wept like a child.

## XI. A Wife Should Obey Her Husband

The countess was right (women are always right—past sixty). Two weeks of happiness brought Pazza to her feet again and enabled her to make a triumphant entrance into the city with the king, her husband. Her paleness and her wounded arm, which she carried in a sling, added to her grace and beauty. Charming had eyes for no one but the queen, and the people followed the king’s gaze.

The king and queen needed more than an hour to reach the castle. The magistrates had erected no fewer than three victory arches. Frowning fortresses defended each by thirty-six deputations and thirty-six speeches. The first arch, made of trelliswork and adorned with leaves and flowers, bore the inscription

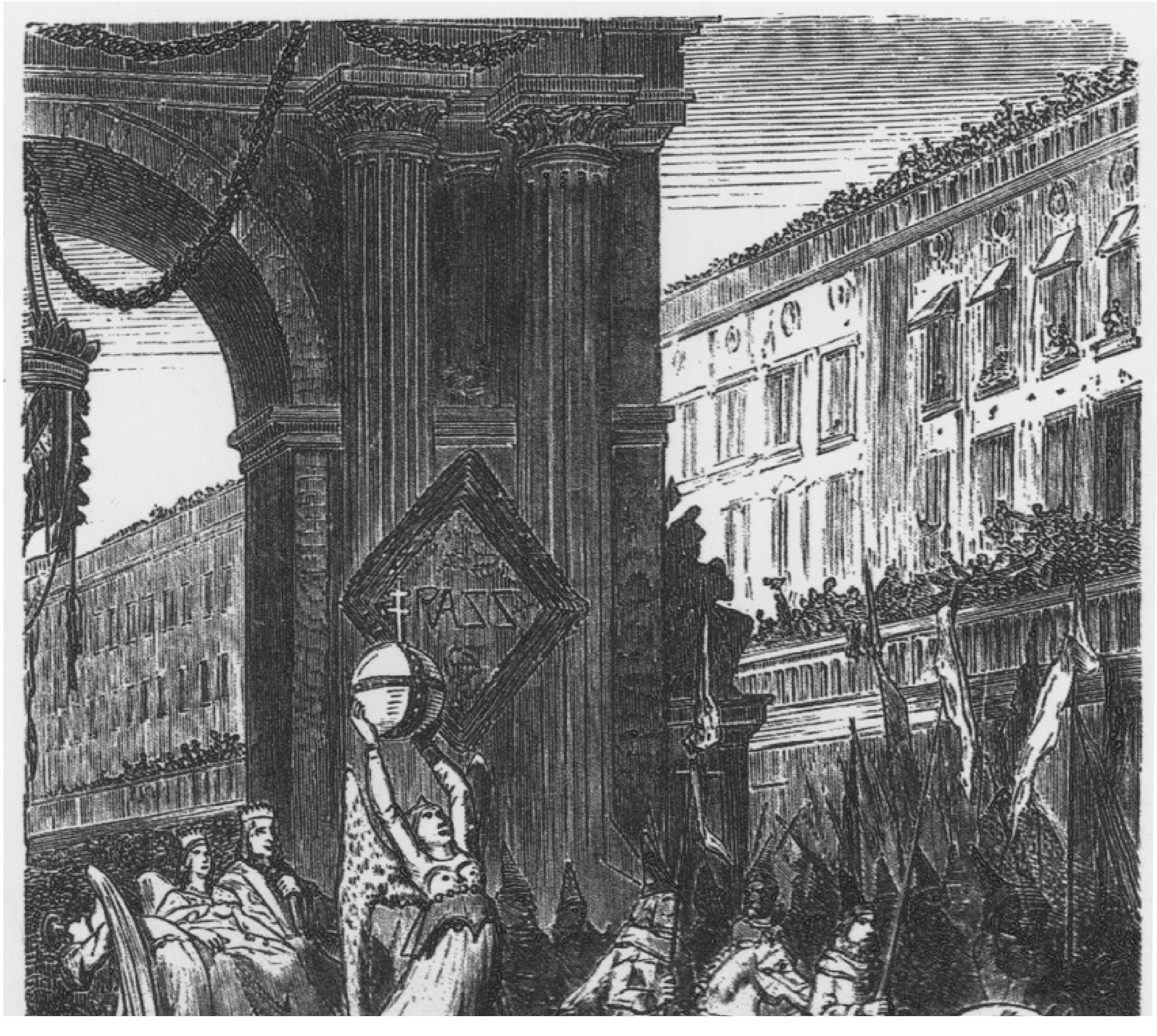
TO THE MOST TENDER AND FAITHFUL OF HUSBANDS.

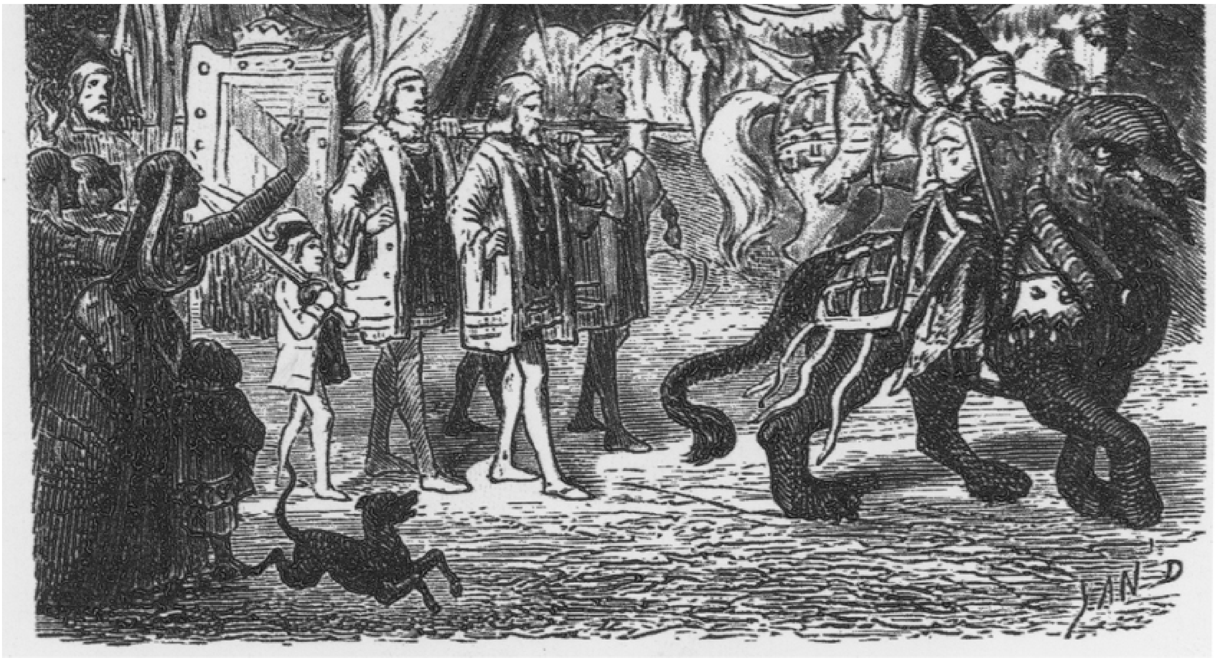
This was entrusted to the keeping of five or six thousand young girls, dressed in white, with pink ribbons representing the spring of the year, the hope of the future, welcoming Glory and Beauty. The second arch, more solidly built, was a frame covered with tapestry, surmounted by Justice, with her eyes bandaged and her scales in hand. On the pedestal of the statue was written

TO THE FATHER OF HIS PEOPLE, THE BEST AND WISEST OF PRINCES.

A host of priests, statesmen, and magistrates, in robes of all colors, represented Religion, Wisdom, and Virtue. At least this is what these venerable and discreet personages said, and they are always correct. Last came an immense arch, a true military trophy, bearing as its motto

TO THE BOLDEST AND MOST VALIANT OF KINGS.





Here the army awaited its general, and the queen was saluted by the majestic voice of a hundred cannons and two hundred drums—a voice before which all human eloquence falters, and which always has the last word.

I shall spare you a description of the dinner, which was interminable, as were the sixty or more speeches from the *Court Gazette*, which had already published them two or three times. They were deposited here for the use of future generations. There is nothing as monotonous as happiness, and we must be indulgent with those who officially sing its praises. In such cases, the ablest is he who says the least. The long evening, during which the king had lavished his most gracious smiles on those he despised at the bottom of his heart, had finally come to an end, and Charming led Pazza, no longer to a dungeon, but to a magnificent apartment, where a new surprise awaited her. At the bottom of the room was an illuminated transparency, on which were written lines so bad that only a king could have been the author of them. These lines, which were not published in the official *Gazette*, have been handed down to us by one of those indiscreet individuals who refuses to let follies of the past be neglected and lost. Such people are the ragpickers of history.

Beware of smacks! You lazy inflexible men!
You who rust in your idleness,

Watch out for smacks! Servile flatterers, what a mess!
You poorly hide your impudence and greediness

Behind fake civility and weak noblesse.
Grave doctors, fateful prophets, you prove again
You're nothing but clever merchants of useless
Words while you mock our cowardice without end.
Beware of smacks!

And you, ungrateful husbands, also you,
Who think you're statesmen who act with finesse,
You who despise those with love and goodness,
Beware in case someday your wives arise
And listen to liberty with all their just pride.
Beware of smacks!

"What does this enigma mean, sire?" Pazza asked.

"It means that I know myself," the king answered. "I am nothing except through you, dear Pazza. All that I know and all that I think, I owe to you. Without you I am nothing but a soulless body, fit only for follies."

"Pardon me if I contradict Your Majesty," Pazza declared.

"Oh," the king responded. "I affect no false modesty. I know very well that I have the clearest head of any in my council. My ministers themselves are obliged to acknowledge it, for they are always of my opinion. Yet, with all this, there is more wisdom in your little finger than in my entire royal brain. My decision, therefore, is fixed. Let my court and people celebrate my wisdom, my goodness, and even my valor. It is all very well, and I accept the homage. You alone have the right to laugh at it, and you will not betray me. But from this day onward, I abandon my power to you. The king, my dear Pazza, will be only the first of your subjects, the faithful minister of your will. You shall write the play, and I shall act in it. The applause will be for me according to custom, but I shall give it back to you through love."

"Do not talk this way, my dear," Pazza said.

"I mean what I say," the king responded warmly. "I want you to take command. Nothing is to be done in my kingdom and my home except according to your will. I am the master and the king. I desire and order it."

"Sire," Pazza declared, "I am your wife and servant. It is my duty to obey."

After this, says the chronicle, they lived happily to a good old age, beloved by all their subjects, and the people of the kingdom of Wild Grass still talk of the good old days of King Charming and Queen Pazza.

[1] “Pazza” means crazy or goofy in Italian. It appears that a very mixed language was spoken in the kingdom of Wild Grass.

[2] Homo sum, humani nihil a me allenum puto.

## ■ Zerbino the Bumpkin

Once upon a time there was a young woodcutter named Zerbino, who lived in Salerno. Unsociable and taciturn, the poor orphan had no friends. He never willingly opened his mouth to anyone, and nobody talked to him. Indeed, since he never troubled himself about the affairs of other people, he was considered a witless fool. Consequently, he was nicknamed Zerbino the Bumpkin, and never was a name better earned.

In the morning, when everyone was still asleep in the city, he trudged to the mountains with his jacket and axe on his shoulder. He remained in the forest the entire day and did not return until dusk, dragging behind him a bundle of measly sticks that he used to pay for his supper. When he passed the fountain where the young maidens gathered every evening to fill their pitchers and empty their throats of gossip, they all laughed at his glum face and mocked the poor woodcutter. Neither Zerbino’s black beard nor his glittering eyes frightened this shameless group. This was the way they tried to provoke an innocent young man.

“Zerbino, my soul mate,” one of the girls cried, “say the word, and my heart is yours.”

“Light of my eyes,” another continued, “show me how lively and colorful you can be, and I’ll be yours.”

“Zerbino, Zerbino,” the chorus of giddy girls repeated, “which of us do you want to marry? Is it me? Is it me? Which one of us will you choose?”

“The loudest chatterbox,” the woodcutter responded, shaking his fist at them.

Then each one answered right away: “Thank you, my good Zerbino! Thank you!”

Bursts of laughter followed, and the poor awkward Zerbino ran home with the grace of a wild boar fleeing a hunter. Once he closed the door behind him, he ate a crust of bread and drank a glass of water. Then he wrapped himself in a tattered blanket and went to sleep on the bare ground. Without care, sorrow, or desire, he quickly fell asleep and hardly dreamed. If true happiness consists in not feeling anything, Zerbino was the happiest of men.

## II

One day, when he became tired from pruning an old box tree as hard as rock, Zerbino wanted to take a nap near a pond surrounded by beautiful trees. To his great surprise, he came upon a marvelously beautiful woman stretched out on the grass. She was clothed in a robe made of swan's feathers. The unfamiliar woman was distressed by a disturbing dream. Her face was tense, her hands, agitated. It appeared as if she were vainly attempting to do away with something oppressive.

"How ridiculous she is," Zerbino said, "to sleep at noon with the sun shining directly on her face! Women are so foolish!"

He noticed some branches in the bushes a couple of feet from the unknown woman and wove them together to shade her head, and he placed his jacket on her like a veil to protect her. Just as he finished weaving the branches and leaves, he saw a snake crawling in the grass a couple of feet away from the woman. It was flickering its poisonous tongue.

"Ah!" cried Zerbino. "So small, and already so wicked!"

And with two blows of his axe, he cut the snake into three pieces that quivered as if they still wanted to reach the woman. So, the woodcutter kicked them with his foot into the pond, where they fell emitting a hissing sound like a red-hot iron dipped into water. The noise woke the fairy, and she stood, her eyes glistening with joy.

"Zerbino!" she exclaimed. "Zerbino!"

"That's my name. I know it," responded the woodcutter. "You needn't shout so loud!"

"What! My friend," the fairy said, "don't you want me to thank you for the service you have done me? You've saved more than just my life!"

"I haven't saved you at all," Zerbino said with his usual clumsy grace. "Just don't sleep on the grass the next time without looking to see if there are snakes. That's my advice to you. Now, good day! Let me go to sleep. I don't have any time to waste."

He stretched himself out fully on the grass and closed his eyes.

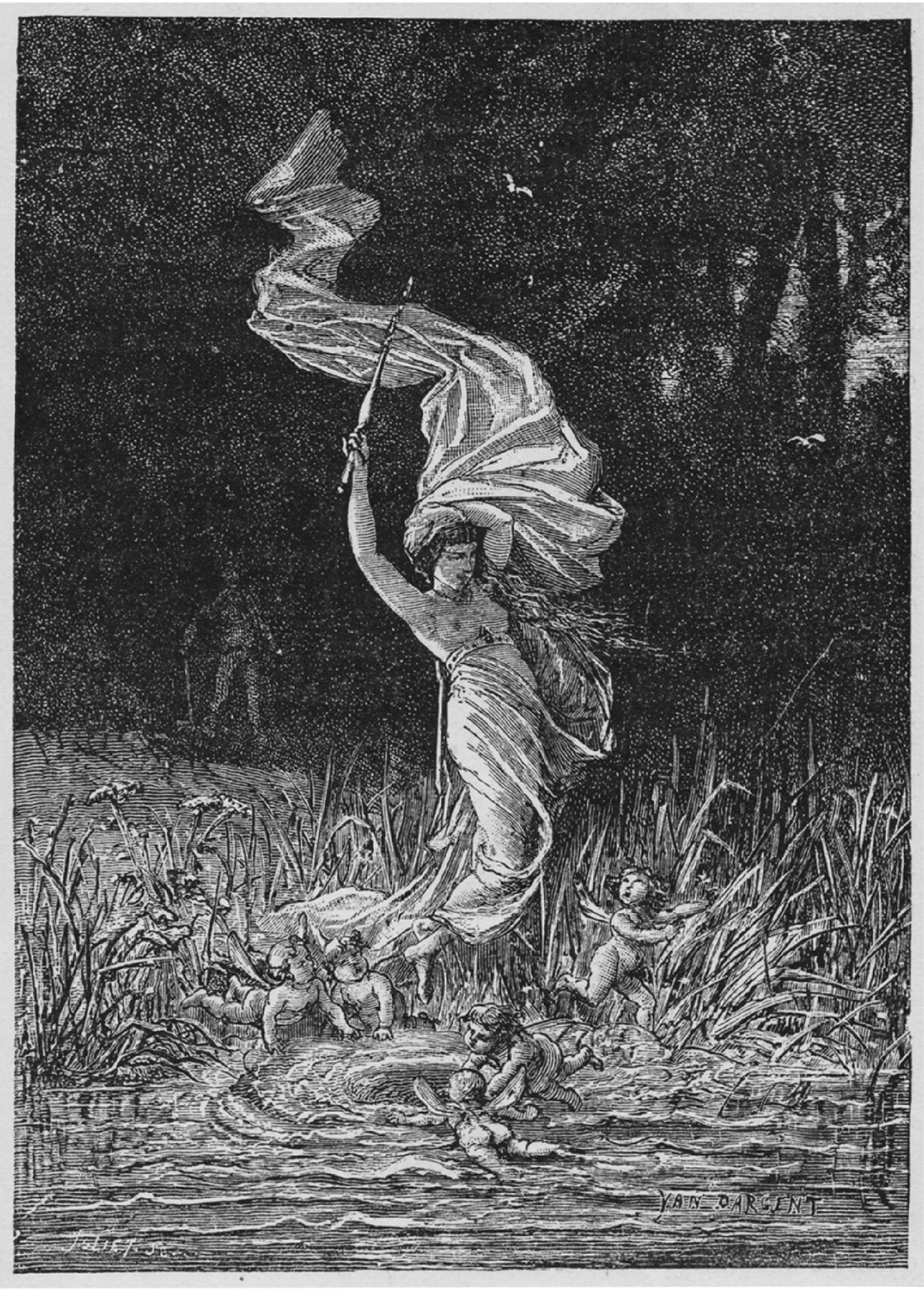
“Zerbino,” the fairy asked, “aren’t you going to ask a favor from me?”

“All I want from you is peace. When a man doesn’t want anything but what he has, he has all that he wants and is content. Good day!”

And the surly woodcutter began to snore.

“Poor boy,” the fairy said, “your soul is asleep, but no matter what you do, I won’t be ungrateful. If it hadn’t been for you, I would have fallen into the hands of a genie, my bitter enemy. Without your help, I would have been turned into a snake for one hundred years. Therefore, I owe you one hundred years of youth and beauty. How should I repay you? I think I know!” she added. “When a man is content with everything he has, he is happy. You said so yourself. Well then, my good Zerbino, whatever else you want, whatever else you might wish for, you will have. Soon, I hope, you’ll bless the fairy of the waters.”

She waved her hazel wand three times in the air. Then she entered the pond in such a graceful manner that not even one wave rippled. At the approach of their queen, the reeds bent their stems; the water lilies opened their freshest blossoms. The trees, the sun, and even the wind smiled at the fairy. Everything seemed to share in her happiness. Then she raised her wand one last time, and as soon as she did this, the waters opened to receive their young sovereign with a flash of bright light as if a sunbeam had pierced the pond to its very bottom. Then everything turned silent and shadowy. Nothing could be heard except the continual snoring of Zerbino.


YAN DARGENT
Juliet sc.

## III

The sun was beginning to set when the woodcutter awoke. He returned calmly to his work, and with a strong arm, he attacked the trunk of the tree whose branches he had lopped off in the morning. The loud blows of the axe resounded in the forest, but they did not make a dent on the hard wood. Bathed in his own sweat, Zerbino kept chopping the gnarled trunk in vain. It defied all his efforts.

“Ah!” he said, looking at his axe, which was totally shattered. “What a shame nobody has yet to invent a tool that could cut wood like butter. I wish I had a tool like that!”

Now, as he stepped back a couple of paces and whirled the axe above his head, he struck the tree with such force that he tumbled backward ten feet. Then he fell with his arms outstretched, and his nose stuck in the ground.

“Good heavens!” he exclaimed. “I must be seeing things! I think I hit the tree too much on the side.”

Zerbino was quickly reassured because the tree suddenly fell so near him that the young man just escaped being crushed by it.

“What a perfect blow!” he exclaimed. “This is amazing! It will shorten all my work. What a clean cut I made! It looks as if the tree were sawed. I don’t think there’s another woodcutter alive like me who can do something like this.”

Upon saying this, he gathered up all the branches he had chopped off that morning and took a rope wrapped around his waist. Then he tied the rope around the branches with a slip-knot so that he could hold them together more firmly. Finally, he mounted the branches.

“Now,” he said, “I must drag them to the city. What a pity that these branches don’t have four legs like horses! Then I’d enter Salerno on a prancing horse like a fine gentleman who rides around just for his pleasure! How I’d like to see myself riding into town this way!”

All of a sudden, the bundle of branches rose and began to trot along the road. Zerbino was not at all astonished and readily mounted this unique steed. Indeed, as he rode, he took pity on all the poor folk who walked on foot because they didn’t have a bundle of branches to carry them.

## IV

During the time that all this took place, there was a large square in the center of Salerno where the king's palace was located. The king, known then to everyone as the famous Mouchamiel, has been immortalized by historians.

Every afternoon his daughter the princess Aleli could be seen sitting sadly on the terrace of the palace. Her attendants tried in vain to charm her with their songs, tales, or flattery. However, Aleli only listened to her thoughts. For three years, the king had wanted to wed her to one of the barons in the vicinity. And for three years the princess had rejected all the suitors. Salerno was to be her dowry, and she knew that it was on account of her dowry alone that they wished to marry her. Serious and tender, Aleli was not ambitious. She wasn't a coquette. She didn't laugh just to show her teeth. She knew how to listen and never spoke when she had nothing to say. This malady, which was very rare among women of fashion, drove the court doctors to despair.

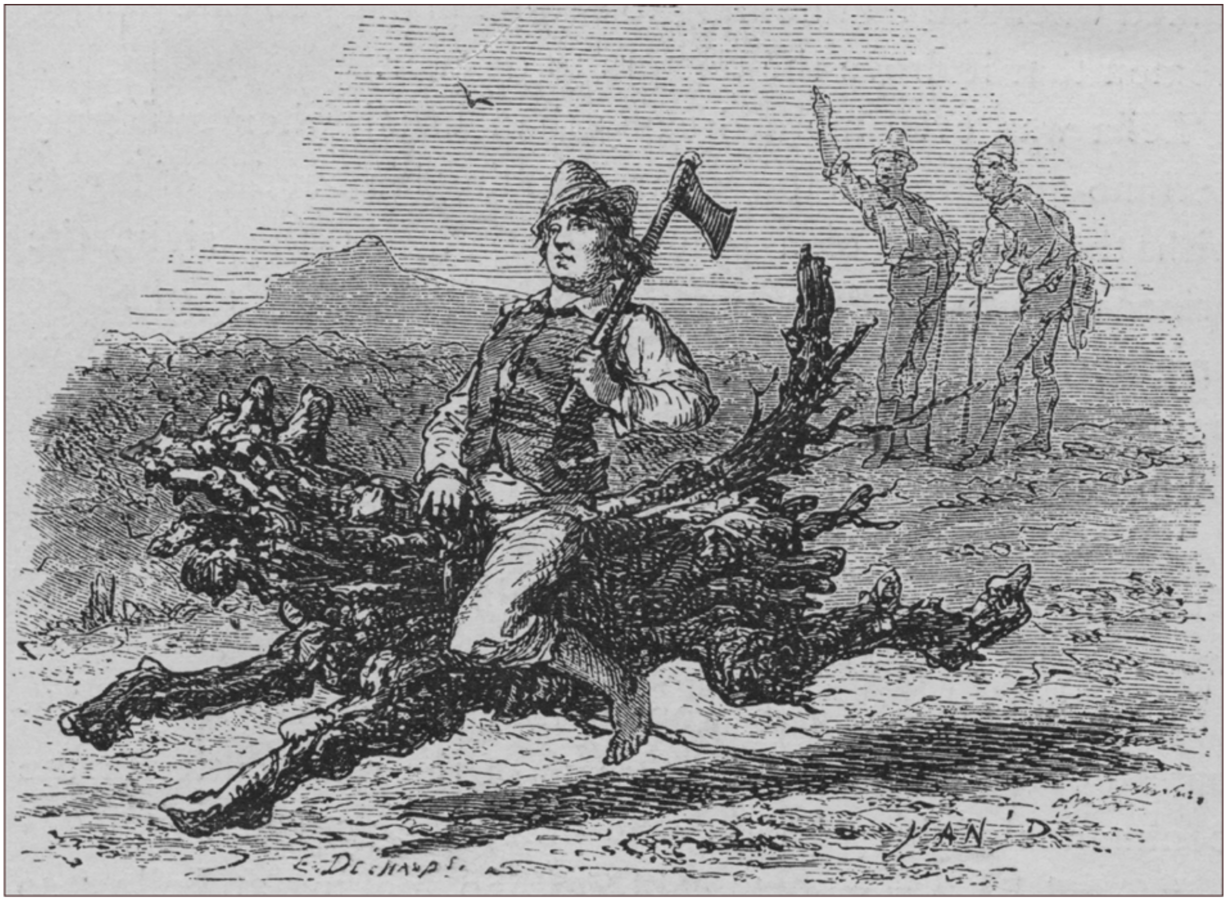
Aleli was much more lost in thought than usual when Zerbino suddenly appeared on the square. He was guiding the bunch of branches with the majesty of an emperor adorned with a plume. As soon as the princess's two ladies-in-waiting caught sight of Zerbino, they burst into a mad fit of laughter, and since they happened to have some oranges in their hands, they began to throw them at the cavalier so adroitly that two of them hit him smack in his face.

"Laugh, you cursed bitches!" Zerbino cried, shaking his fist at them. "May you keep on laughing until all your teeth rot to their gums. This is what I wish would happen to you!"

And this is what occurred. The two women doubled up with laughter. Indeed, they couldn't stop, and neither the threats of the woodcutter nor the orders of the princess could restrain the women so that the princess took pity on the poor young man.

"Kind little woman," Zerbino said, noting how sweet and sad she was. "I wish you all the very best. May you fall in love with the first man who makes you laugh, and may you marry him in the bargain!"

Upon saying this, he brushed back his hair and bowed to the princess in the most elegant manner possible. Consequently, he forgot general rule one, which states that whoever is riding a bunch of branches like a horse should never bow to anyone, not even a princess. Zerbino forgot this, and it turned out to be his misfortune. In order to bow to the princess, he had to let go of the rope that held the bundle of branches together. All at once, the sticks fell apart, and the good Zerbino tumbled backward with his feet in the air in the most grotesque and ridiculous manner possible. He recovered by making a daring somersault, carrying half the leaves with him. Crowned like a sylvan god, he rolled another ten feet on the ground.



How is it that when anyone falls down and risks breaking his neck, everyone laughs? I don’t know. It’s a mystery that philosophers have yet to explain. What I do know is that everyone laughed, and that Princess Aleli did just as the rest did. But as soon as she stood up, she gazed at Zerbino in a strange way and placed her hand on her heart. Then she moved her hand to her head and went back into the palace, completely distressed by an unknown murky feeling.

Meanwhile, Zerbino gathered the scattered branches together and returned home on foot like an ordinary woodcutter. Prosperity had not dazzled him. Moreover, recent bad luck had not troubled him. It had been a good day, and that was sufficient for him. He bought a good Italian cheese, white and hard as marble. Then he cut a large slice and dined with the best of appetites. The simpleton had no idea whatsoever about the mischief he had caused and the chaos he had left behind him.

## V

While these grave events were taking place, the clock in the tower of Salerno struck four. The day was boiling hot, and silence reigned in the streets. Relaxing in a lower chamber, far from the heat and noise, King Mouchamiel was dreaming about the welfare of his people. He was asleep.

All at once, he awoke with a start. A pair of arms hugged his neck, and his face was wet with scalding tears. It was the lovely Aleli, who embraced her father with a flood of affection.

“What’s the meaning of all this?” the king asked, surprised by this excessive affection. “Why are you hugging me and weeping? You’re just like your mother and want to coax something out of me so that I’ll do your will.”

“On the contrary, my dear father, your obedient daughter has come to tell you that she’ll do whatever you wish. I’ve found the son-in-law you’ve been wishing for me, and to please you, I’m ready to give him my hand.”

“Good!” exclaimed Mouchamiel. “This is now the end of all your whims. Who is this man you’re going to marry? Is it the Prince of Cava? No. Then, it’s the Count of Capri, or the Marquis of Sorrento? No. Well, tell me who it is.”

“I don’t know, dear father.”

“What! You don’t know! … But you must have seen him?”

“Yes, just now, in the public square.”

“And did he speak to you?”

“No, Father, what’s the use of words when hearts understand each other?”

Mouchamiel made a grimace, rubbed his ear, and peered at his daughter through his half-closed eyelids.

"At the very least," he said, "he must be a prince."

"I don't know, Father. But what does it matter?"

"It matters a great deal, my daughter. It's clear you know nothing about politics. If you were to choose freely a son-in-law who suits me, that would be perfect. As a king and a father, I shall never interfere with your will as long as it agrees with mine. But, otherwise, I have duties to perform concerning my family and subjects, and I expect everyone to carry out my will. Now, where is this handsome bird, whom you don't know, who has never spoken to you, and who adores you?"

"I don't know," Aleli replied.

"This is too much!" Mouchamiel cried out. "Have you come here just to talk nonsense and take up my time, which belongs to my people? Enough's enough! Chambermaids! Call the princess's ladies, and let them take her back to her rooms."

On hearing these words, Aleli raised her arms to heaven and burst into tears. As she sobbed, she fell at the king's feet. Just then, the two women who had laughed at Zerbino entered the chamber. They were still laughing and about to split their sides.

"Silence, you miserable wretches, silence!" Mouchamiel exclaimed. He was greatly offended by this lack of respect. However, the more the king cried silence, the louder the women laughed without regard for proper etiquette.

"Guards!" exclaimed the king, who was beside himself. "Seize these insolent women and cut off their heads. I shall teach them that you don't make fun of a king!"

"Sire," said Aleli, clasping her hands, "remember that you have made your royal reign illustrious by abolishing the death penalty."

"You're right, my daughter. We are a civilized people. We shall spare these women and content ourselves with treating them in the Russian fashion with all possible consideration. Let them be whipped until they die a natural death."

"Mercy, my father, mercy," responded Aleli. "It's your daughter who begs you to pardon them for mercy's sake."

"Well then, by God, let them stop laughing, and get rid of them!" the good Mouchamiel declared. "Take these idiots away. I forgive them. Lock them in a cell till they die of silence and boredom."

“Oh, Father!” poor Aleli sobbed.

“All right!” the king said. “Marry them off, and let that be the end of it!”

“Thank you, sire! We won’t laugh anymore,” the two women cried out as they fell on their knees, opened their mouths, and showed their toothless gums. “We are grateful for your pardon, and we hope you will avenge us. We are the victims of an infernal art. Some kind of wicked sorcerer has bewitched us.”

“A sorcerer in my realm?” cried the king, who was a free-thinker. “It’s impossible. There are no sorcerers because I don’t believe in them.”

“Sire,” one of the women asked, “is it natural for a bundle of branches to trot like a horse and prance while a woodcutter holds the reins? This is what we have just seen in the square before the palace.”

“A bundle of branches!” responded the king. “All this seems like witchcraft. Guards, seize the man and his branches, and let them all be burned! After that, I hope I can sleep in peace.”

“Burn my beloved!” exclaimed the princess, tossing her arms like a visionary. “Sire, this noble cavalier is my future husband, my love, my life. If a single hair on his head is touched, I shall die.”

“My home has become hell!” poor Mouchamiel cried. “What is the use of being king if I can’t even take an afternoon nap? It’s all due to my good nature. Call Mistigris! Since I have a minister, the least that he can do is to tell me what to think, and let me know what I wish.”

## VI

Soon thereafter Signor Mistigris was announced to the king. He was a little man, fat, short, round and broad, who rolled into rooms more than he walked. His weasel eyes looked every which way at once. He had a low forehead, hooked nose, chubby cheeks, and a triple chin. Such was the figure of the famous minister who was in charge of making the people of Salerno happy in the name of King Mouchamiel. As he entered the king’s chamber, he was smiling, puffing, and simpering like a man who has cheerfully assumed power and dealt with all the cares and troubles of the realm.

“Here you are at last!” the king said. “How is it that strange things are happening in my realm, and I, the king, am the last to be informed of them?”

“Everything is happening in the usual way,” Mistigris said calmly. “I have the police reports here. Peace and happiness prevail throughout the state.” He opened a large packet of papers and read as follows:

“Port of Salerno: Everything is tranquil. There have been no more robberies at the border crossing than usual. Three quarrels between sailors and six stabbing wounds. Five admissions to the hospital. Nothing new. Upper city: Taxes have been doubled. The prosperity and morality continue to grow. Two women dead from starvation. Ten children deserted by their parents. Three men have beaten their wives. Ten wives have beaten their husbands. Thirty robberies. Two assassinations. Three poisonings. Nothing new.”

“Is that all you know?” asked Mouchamiel, who was irritated. “Well, sir, though it is not my job to be informed about the affairs of the state, I know more about them than you do. A man has ridden through the square on a bundle of branches, and he has bewitched my daughter. The result is that she wishes to marry him.”

“Sire,” Mistigris said, “I was not ignorant of this incident. A minister knows everything. But why should I trouble Your Majesty with such trifles? The man will be hanged, and that will be the end of the matter.”

“And can you tell me where this scoundrel is to be found?” “Certainly, sire!” Mistigris replied. “A minister sees everything, hears everything, and is present everywhere.”

“Well, sir,” the king declared, “if in a quarter of an hour this fool is not here, you will leave the ministry to those people who are not content with just seeing, but who also act. Off you go!”

Mistigris left the room still smiling. But once in the ante-room, he turned purple as if he were drowning and were forced to grab hold of the arm of the first friend he met. This was the prefect of the city, who happened to be walking nearby. So, Mistigris took a few steps back and grabbed the magistrate by the collar.

“Sir!” he said slowly and emphatically. “If in ten minutes you don’t bring me the man who rides through Salerno on a bundle of branches, I shall dismiss you. Do you understand? I shall fire you! Now, off you go!”

Stunned by this threat, the prefect rushed to the chief of police.

“Where is the man who’s riding a bundle of branches?” he asked.

“What man?” the chief of police replied.

“Don’t argue with your superior. I won’t put up with it. By not arresting this scoundrel, you’ve utterly failed to do your duties. If this man is not here in five minutes, I shall fire you. Now, off you go!”

The chief rushed to the police station, where he found the officers in charge of public safety throwing dice.

“You idiots!” he cried. “If in three minutes you do not bring me the man who’s been riding on a bundle of branches, I’ll have you all whipped like galley slaves. Off you go, and don’t say a word!”

The men began cursing as they departed. Meanwhile, the wise and capable Mistigris, who trusted in the miraculous ways of hierarchy, returned to the king’s chamber in great tranquility. Indeed, his lips formed that perpetual smile which formed part of his profession.

## VII

Two words whispered into the king’s ear delighted Mouchamiel. The idea of burning a sorcerer did not displease him. It would be a pretty little event that would do honor to his reign and would provide evidence of his wisdom that would astonish posterity. Only one thing troubled the king, namely poor Aleli, still there, drowning in tears, whom her ladies-in-waiting had vainly tried to lead back to her rooms.

Mistigris winked at the king. Then, approaching the princess, he said in his softest voice: “Madam, he will soon be here, and he must not find you in tears. On the contrary, you should make yourself twice as beautiful as ever, and the very sight of you will assure him of his happiness.”

“I understand you, good Mistigris!” Aleli exclaimed. “Thanks, my dear father, thanks,” she added, grasping her father’s hands and covering them with kisses. “Bless you, bless you a thousand times!”

She left the royal chamber overcome by joy, head erect, eyes sparkling, and so happy that she stopped the first chamberlain in the corridor and informed him of her forthcoming marriage.

“My good chamberlain,” she added, “he is coming. Show him the honors of the palace yourself, and rest assured that you will be rewarded.”

Left alone with Mistigris, the king gave his minister a furious look.

"Are you mad?" he cried. "What are you doing? Without consulting me, you've pledged my word! Do you think you're the lord of my realm and that you can dispose of my daughter and me without my consent?"

"Bah!" Mistigris replied with great composure. "The first thing to be done is to calm the princess. In politics one should only concern oneself with the present. Tomorrow is another day."

"But … my word!" responded the king. "How do you expect me now to take back my word without perjuring myself? At the very least I want revenge myself on that insolent peasant who has stolen my daughter's heart."

"Sire," said Mistigris, "a king never breaks his word, but there are several ways of keeping it."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Mouchamiel.

"Your Majesty," the minister replied, "has just promised your daughter that she will be married. Well, we will marry her, after which we shall obey the law, which decrees that if a noble under the rank of a baron dares to claim the love of a princess of royal blood, he will be decapitated. If the suitor is a commoner, he will be treated like a commoner and hanged. If he is a peasant, he will be drowned like a dog. You see, sire, nothing is easier than to align your paternal love with your royal justice. We have so many laws in Salerno that one can always be found to accommodate our case."

"Mistigris," the king exclaimed, "you are a rascal!"

"Sire," said the fat man, puffing himself up, "you flatter me! I am nothing but a politician. I've been taught that there is one kind of morality for kings and a lesser one for the people, and I have profited from this lesson. It is this discrimination that accounts for the genius of a statesman, the admiration of clever people, and the scandal of fools."

"My good friend," said the king, "you exhaust me with your long-winded speeches. I don't ask you for words, but for action. Pursue and execute this man."

As he was speaking, Princess Aleli entered the royal chamber. She was so beautiful, and her eyes beamed with such joy that the good Mouchamiel sighed and began to wish that the cavalier of the branches might be a prince so that he wouldn't have to be hanged.

# VIII

There is nothing finer than glory, but it has its disadvantages. Anyone who has glory must say goodbye to the pleasure of living unknown and defying the foolish curiosity of the crowd. The triumphal entry of Zerbino into Salerno did not reach its end until every child in the city was familiar with his personality, home, and way of living. Consequently, the king's servants had little trouble in finding the man they sought.

Zerbino was on his knees in his courtyard, occupied with sharpening his famous axe. He was just testing the blade with his thumbnail when a hand grabbed his collar and pulled him vigorously onto his feet. Ten punches and twenty pokes on his back propelled him into the street. This was the way he learned that a minister of the state was interested in him, and that the king himself had deigned to invite him to the palace.

Zerbino was wise about the ways of the world, and such a man is not astonished by anything, especially not by the ways of royalty. He placed his hands on his belt and walked on quietly and did not get upset about the hail of blows that fell upon him. Nevertheless, to be wise is not synonymous with being a saint. At last, a kick in the back of his legs exhausted the wood-cutter's patience.

"Gently," he said. "Have a little pity on a poor man."

"I believe that this weird guy wants to argue with us," said one of the men tormenting him. "The gentleman is delicate. We shall have to handle him with kid gloves."

"I wish you were in my place," Zerbino said. "Then we would see whether you would laugh."

"Keep quiet, you creep!" cried the leader of the guards, who tried to hit him with so much force that he would have knocked over an ox if his blow had landed. However, the hit was badly aimed. Instead of striking Zerbino, it went straight into the eye of one of the guards. Furious and half-blinded, the wounded man jumped on the clumsy leader who had struck him, and grabbed his hair. They immediately began to fight, and the other guards tried to separate them. Fisticuffs rained up and down, left and right. Children screamed, women shrieked, and dogs barked. In the end, they were obliged to call the police patrol to restore order by arresting everyone involved in the fight, the wounded, and the onlookers.

Zerbino was still unmoved by all this as he continued to walk toward the palace. Then, all at once, he was approached in the square by a long line of handsome gentlemen in embroidered coats and short pants. They were the king’s valets, who, under the command of the majordomo and the grand chamberlain himself, had come to meet the princess’s fiancé. Since they had been ordered to be courteous to Zerbino, each one had his hat in his hand and a smile on his lips. They greeted Zerbino with a bow and a salute, and the woodcutter, a well-bred man, returned the bow and the salute. They saluted him once again, and Zerbino again returned the salute. They did this eight or ten times in succession with perfect solemnity. Zerbino was the first to get tired because he had not been born in the palace, and his back was less supple than theirs. Indeed, Zerbino was not accustomed to bowing.

“Stop!” he cried. “Enough! As the song says, after three refusals, good luck. After three bows, the dance. You who have bowed long enough, it’s time to dance.”

And, all at once, the valets began to dance and bow, and to bow and dance, and, preceding Zerbino in admirable order, they formed an entrance into the castle worthy of a king.

## IX

To make himself look as imposing as possible, Mouchamiel stared seriously at the end of his nose. Aleli was sighing. Mis-tigris was sharpening a quill, like a diplomat in search of an idea, and the courtiers, motionless and silent, seemed lost in contemplation. Finally, the large door of the salon opened. The majordomo and the valets entered in step, dancing a saraband, which greatly surprised the court. The woodcutter walked behind them and was not at all impressed by the royal splendor. It was as if he had been born in a palace. Nevertheless, as soon as he saw the king, he stopped, took off his hat, and, clasping it in both hands to his chest, bowed three times and stretched out his right foot. After doing this, he put on his hat again, seated himself calmly in an armchair, and crossed his legs.

“My father!” cried the princess, throwing herself around his neck. “This is the husband you have given me. How handsome and noble he is! Don’t you just love him?”

“Mistigris,” mumbled Mouchamiel, half strangled by his daughter, “question this man with the greatest respect. Think of my daughter’s peace of mind and my own. What bad luck! Ah! How happy fathers would be if they had no children!”

“Your Majesty may rest assured,” Mistigris responded. “Humanity is my duty and pleasure.” Then, looking at Zerbino, he said brusquely, “Get up, you rascal, and respond quickly if you wish to save your skin. Are you a prince in disguise? You are silent, you miserable thing! You must be a sorcerer.”

“I am no more a sorcerer than you are, my fat fellow,” Zerbino answered without getting up from his chair.

“You rogue!” the minister screamed. “Your denial proves your crime! Your silence exposes you! You’re a triple villain!”

“If I were to confess, would I be innocent?” Zerbino asked.

“Sire!” said Mistigris, who mistook rage for eloquence. “Do justice! Purge your realm. Purge the earth of this monster! Death is too mild a punishment for such a braggart!”

“Keep on yelling!” Zerbino said. “Bark, my fat fellow, bark! But don’t bite.”

“Sire!” said Mistigris, puffing away. “Everything depends on your justice and humanity right now. *Bow, wow wow!* Humanity commands you to protect your subjects by ridding them of this sorcerer. *Bow, wow, wow!* Justice demands that he should be hanged or burned at the stake. *Bow, wow, wow!* You are a father. *Bow, wow, wow!* But you are also a king. *Bow, wow, wow!* And the king should rule over the father. *Bow, wow, wow!*”

“Mistigris,” said the king, “you speak well, but your twitching and barking are unbearable. Don’t be so affected. Just finish what you have to say!”

“Sire,” the minister replied, “the noose, the stake, death. *Bow, wow, wow!*”

While the king sighed, Aleli suddenly left her father’s side and took a place next to Zerbino.

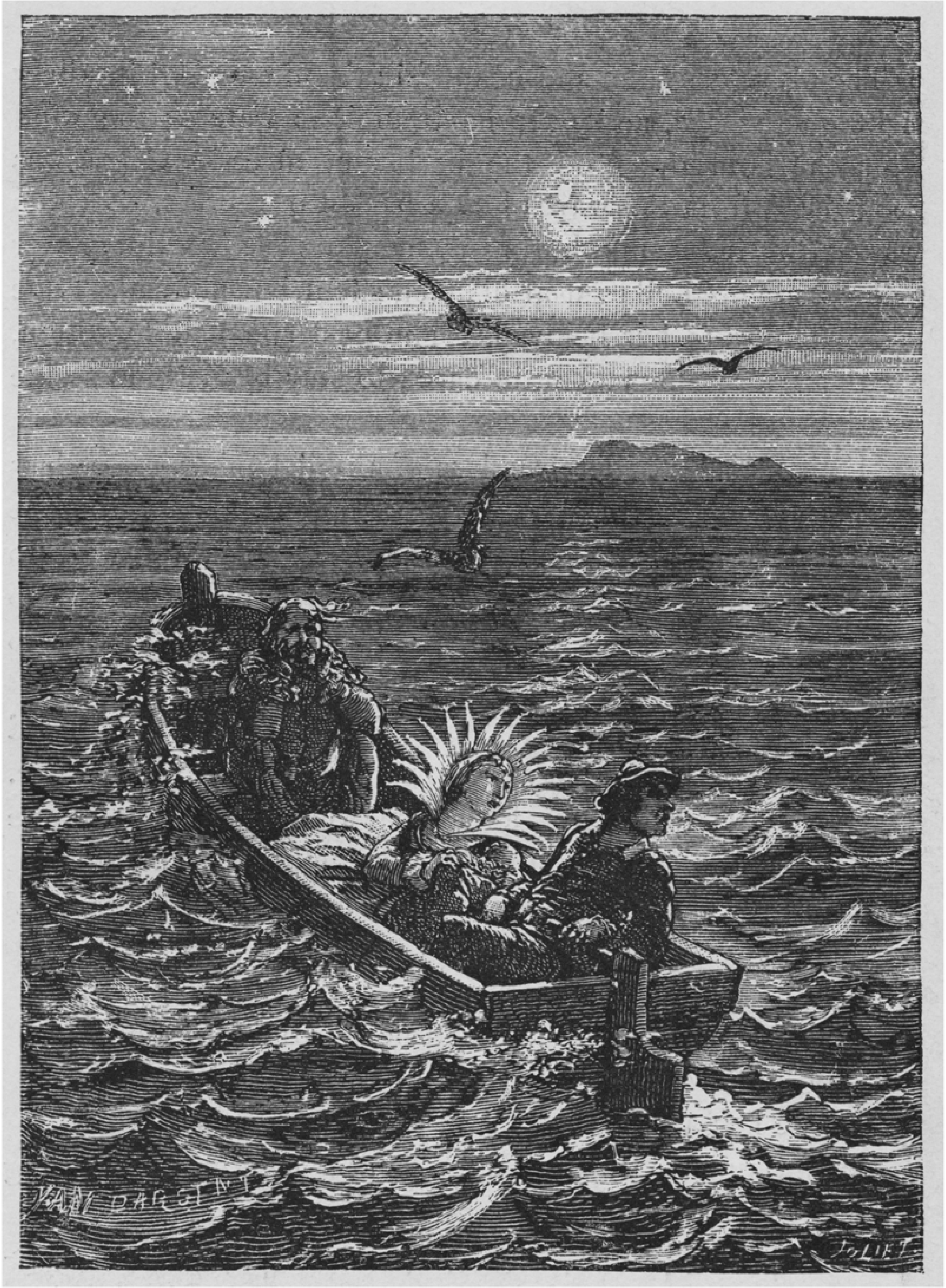
“Give your command, sire,” she said. “This is my husband. I shall share his fate whatever it may be.”

Upon hearing this scandalous talk, all the ladies at the court covered their faces. Mistigris himself thought it incumbent on him to blush.

“Unfortunate girl!” cried the king, in a furious rage. “By disgracing yourself, you have condemned yourself. Guards! Arrest these two creatures! Let them be married on the spot. After that, I want you to seize the first boat that you find in the harbor. Then throw these guilty wretches into it, and abandon them to the waves.”

“‘Oh, sire!” Mistigris cried, as the guards were dragging away the princess and Zerbino. “You are the greatest king on earth. Your kindness, indulgence, and gentleness will set an example and astonish posterity. Just think how the *Official Gazette* will celebrate your generosity tomorrow! As for us, we are overcome by such magnanimity and can only admire it in silence.”

“My poor daughter!” the king exclaimed. “What will become of her without her father? Guards, seize Mistigris, and throw him into the boat, too. It will be a consolation to me to know that such an able man will be with my dear Aleli. At any rate, it is always a pleasant diversion to change ministers, and in my sad condition I need something of the sort. Farewell, my good Mistigris.”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Mistigris stood with his mouth wide open. Just as he recovered enough breath to curse monarchs and their ingratitude, he was dragged from the palace. In spite of his screams, threats, pleading, and tears, he was tossed into the boat, and the three companions soon found themselves alone on the wide sea.

As for the good king Mouchamiel, he wiped away a tear and shut himself up in his chamber to finish his nap so rudely interrupted.

## X

The night was calm and beautiful. The moon illuminated the sea and shed its clear light on the rippling waves. The wind propelled the bark for some distance, and already Capri could be seen rising from the waters like a basket of flowers. Zerbino was at the helm and humming some kind of plaintive song about a woodcutter or a sailor. Aleli sat at his feet, silent, but not sad. She was listening to her beloved. She forgot the past and rarely thought about the future. Her greatest desire in life was to remain by Zerbino's side.

Mistigris was not so mellow and was less philosophical. Restless and furious, he moved about like a bear in a cage and made long speeches to Zerbino, who paid no attention but only nodded, stoic as ever. Zerbino was not accustomed to official speeches, and consequently, the minister's talk put him to sleep.

"What will become of us?" Mistigris cried. "You nasty sorcerer, if you have any power, show it, and get us out of here. Make yourself prince or king somewhere, and appoint me your prime minister. I must have something to govern. What's the use of having power if you don't make fortunes for your friends?"

"I'm hungry," Zerbino said with half-opened eyes.

Aleli sprang up instantly and began to look around her.

"My love," she asked, "what would you like?"

"I'd like some figs and raisins," the woodcutter responded.

Mistigris uttered a cry. A barrel of figs and raisins sprang up between his legs and knocked him over.

"Oh!" he thought as he jumped back on his feet. "I know your secret, you cursed sorcerer. If you can have whatever you wish, my fortune is made. It’s not for nothing that I’ve been a minister, my fine prince, and I’ll make you wish for whatever I wish.”

While Zerbino was eating his figs, Mistigris approached him, bowing and smiling.

“Lord Zerbino,” he said. “I should like to request Your Excellency’s peerless friendship. Perhaps Your Excellency did not understand all the devotion I hid under the pretended severity of my words, but I can assure you that it was calculated to hasten your happiness. It was I alone who brought about your happy marriage so quickly.”

“I am hungry,” Zerbino said. “Give me some figs and raisins.”

“Here they are, my lord,” Mistigris said with all the grace of a courtier. “I hope His Excellency will be satisfied with all my humble services and will allow me often to give proof of my zeal.”

Then Mistigris stepped back and muttered in a low voice: “Brute! You’re not even listening to me. I must absolutely get Aleli to advocate for my interests. The great secret in politics is to know how to please the ladies.”

Turning to Zerbino, Mistigris remarked, “By the way, have you forgotten that you were married this evening? Shouldn’t you give a wedding gift to your royal bride?”

“You are irritating, my fat fellow,” Zerbino answered. “A wedding gift? Where do you expect me to fish for such a thing? At the bottom of the sea? I wish you’d go and ask the fish, and bring one back to me.”

All at once, Mistigris plunged overboard as if an invisible hand had pushed him, and he disappeared beneath the waves. Meanwhile, Zerbino returned to devour his figs and munch his raisins, while Aleli kept gazing at him.

“There’s a porpoise rising to the surface,” Zerbino said.

However, it wasn’t a porpoise, but the unfortunate messenger, who had risen to the top of the waves. Zerbino grabbed him by his hair and pulled him onboard the boat. Strange to say, the fat man carried in his teeth a carbuncle that shone like a star in the middle of the night.

As soon as he could catch his breath, Mistigris uttered, “Here’s the gift sent to the charming Aleli by the king of the fish. You see, Lord Zerbino, you have in me the most faithful and devoted of slaves. If you would ever like to entrust me with a small minister’s office …”

“I’m still hungry,” interrupted Zerbino. “Give me some more figs and raisins.”

“My lord,” Mistigris resumed, “aren’t you going to do something for your wife, the princess? This boat is exposed to all kinds of changes to the weather and isn’t worthy for someone of her birth and beauty.”

“Enough, Mistigris!” Aleli said. “I feel fine here and don’t want anything.”

“Do you remember, madam,” the officious minister replied, “that when the Prince of Capri offered you his hand, he sent a splendid ship to Salerno. It was made of mahogany inlaid all over with gold and ivory. The sailors were dressed in velvet. The rigging was silk, and the salons were adorned with mirrors. That is what a petty prince did for you. I am sure now that Lord Zerbino, noble, powerful, and good as he is, will do much better for you than this prince.”

“What a fool this man is!” Zerbino said. “He talks all the time. Well, I should like to have such a boat if only to stop your mouth, you chatterbox! After that you’re to keep quiet.”

And suddenly Aleli uttered a cry of surprise and joy that made the woodcutter quiver.

“Where am I?” he wondered. Well, he was now on board a magnificent ship that cut through the waves as gracefully as a swan with wings outspread. A tent on the bridge lit by alabaster lamps formed a richly furnished drawing room on deck. Aleli, still seated at her husband’s feet, gazed at him in admiration. Meanwhile, Mistigris ran all over the ship and tried to give orders to all the sailors. But on this strange vessel no one said a word. Mistigris wasted his eloquence and could not even find a cabin boy to command.

Zerbino rose to look over the ship, and Mistigris followed him immediately, always smiling along the way.

“Is Your Lordship satisfied with my efforts and zeal?” he asked.

“Keep quiet, you chatterbox,” the woodcutter said. “I forbid you to say another word till morning. I’m drowsy. Let me go to sleep.”

Mistigris stood with his mouth gaping. He made some respectful gestures, and then, in despair, he went below to the dining room and ate his supper in silence. He drank for four hours, unable to console himself, and finished by falling asleep under the table. In the meantime Zerbino dreamed in ease. The only person not to close her eyes was Aleli.

## XI

One tires of everything, even of happiness, according to a proverb. With much greater reason, one might tire of being at sea on a ship without a destination manned by people who do not speak.

Consequently, as soon as Mistigris had regained his senses and recovered his ability to talk, his sole idea was to persuade Zerbino to wish to be on land. However, the task was difficult. The adroit courtier was in constant fear that some indiscreet wish might send him back to the fish. He trembled and was afraid above everything that Zerbino might regret not having his axe and being in the woods. How degrading it would be to serve as the minister of a woodcutter!

Fortunately, Zerbino awoke in an excellent mood. He was becoming accustomed to the princess, and no matter how coarse he was, he was delighted by her charming face. Mistigris wanted to take advantage of this opportunity, but alas! Women are unreasonable when they, by chance, fall in love. Aleli told Zerbino how sweet it would be to live alone together, far from the world and all the noise, in some quiet cottage in an orchard, on the banks of a stream. Without comprehending a word of this poetry, the good Zerbino listened with pleasure to her sweet words that enchanted him.

“A cottage with cows and chickens,” he said, “that would be very good. If …”

Mistigris felt himself lost and struck a decisive blow.

“Oh, my lord!” he cried. “Look over there in front of you! How beautiful that is!”

“What?” asked the princess. “I don’t see anything.”

“Nor do I,” said Zerbino, rubbing his eyes.

“Is it possible?” Mistigris remarked with an air of astonishment. “What! Don’t you see that marble palace gleaming in the sun, and that staircase adorned with orange trees, which leads down a hundred steps to the seashore?”

“A palace?” Aleli exclaimed. “I don’t want to live surrounded by courtiers, selfish people, and valets. Let us flee.”

“Yes,” said Zerbino. “A cottage is better. We could lead a peaceful life there.”

“But this palace is unlike any other!” exclaimed Mistigris, his imagination excitedby his fears. “In this fairy dwelling there are neither courtiers nor valets. You are served by invisible hands and are at once alone and surrounded by attendants. All the parts of the furniture have hands, and the walls have ears.”

“Do they have tongues?” Zerbino asked.

“Yes,” Mistigris responded, “they tell you everything you wish to know, but they keep quiet whenever you desire.”

“Very good, then,” the woodcutter said. “They have more brains than you. I’d like very much to have a castle like that. Where is this beautiful palace? I don’t see it.”

“It’s there, right before you, my dear!” the princess exclaimed.

The boat made for land and anchored in a harbor just deep enough for it to come up to the pier. The harbor was half surrounded by a grand staircase made of wrought iron. At the head of this staircase was the most charming palace ever seen. It overlooked the sea on a vast plateau. The three companions cheerfully climbed the staircase. Mistigris took the lead, puffing at every step. Upon reaching the castle gate, he attempted to ring, but there was no bell. So, he called, and the gate itself answered.

“What do you want, stranger?” it asked.

“I want to speak with the lord of this palace,” said Mistigris, somewhat intrigued by talking for the first time to a gate.

“The lord of this palace is Lord Zerbino,” the gate replied. “When he approaches, I shall open.”

Soon after this, Zerbino appeared with the beautiful Aleli on his arm. Then the gate opened respectfully, and let the pair pass, followed by Mistigris. Once they were on the terrace, Aleli looked at the magnificent spectacle beneath her eyes—the sea, the immense sea glittering in the morning sunshine.

“How pleasant it is here!” she exclaimed. “How delightful it would be to sit on this terrace covered by the blossoming laurels.”

“Well,” said Zerbino, “let us sit on the ground.”

“Aren’t there any easy chairs here?” Mistigris asked.

“Here we are! Here we are!” cried the easy chairs, and they rushed to the terrace, one after another, as fast as their four feet could carry them.

“This would be a nice place for breakfast,” Mistigris remarked.

“Yes,” replied Zerbino, “but where is the table?”

“Here I am! Here I am!” a contralto voice answered, and a beautiful mahogany table, marching with the seriousness of a matriarch, strode forward and placed itself before the guests.

“This is charming,” the princess said, “but where are the plates of food?”

“Here we are! Here we are!” numerous little shrill voices cried, and thirty platters, followed by their sisters, the plates, and their cousins, the knives and forks, without forgetting their aunts, the salt shakers, arranged themselves admirably on the table, which was covered with roast meat, fruit, and flowers.

“Lord Zerbino,” Mistigris said, “you see what I have done for you. All this is my doing!”

“You’re lying!” cried a voice.

Mistigris turned around, but saw no one. It was one of the pillars of the terrace that had spoken.

“My lord,” said he, “no one can accuse me of being a fraud. I have always spoken the truth.”

“You’re lying!” a voice cried out.

“This palace is odious,” Mistigris thought. “If the walls here speak the truth, we’ll never be able to establish a court, and I’ll never be prime minister. I’ve got to change all this.” Then he resumed speaking aloud. “Lord Zerbino, instead of living here alone, wouldn’t you prefer to be king and to have dutiful subjects who pay you small taxes, furnish you with soldiers, and surround you with love and tenderness?”

“Why would I want to be king? What good would that do me?” Zerbino replied.

“My friend, don’t listen to him,” the good Aleli said. “Let us stay here. We are so happy, we two alone.”

“We three,” cried Mistigris. “I am the happiest of men here, and with you I desire nothing more.”

“You’re lying!” a voice said.

“What? My lord, is there anyone here who dares doubt my devotion?”

“You’re lying!” an echo sounded.

“My lord, don’t listen to this!” Mistigris pleaded. “I honor and love you.

I swear it.”

“You’re lying!” the pitiless voice repeated.

“Ah, since you continue to lie, I wish you’d fly off to the moon,” said Zerbino. “It’s the land of liars.”

Zerbino’s words were fateful, for instantly Mistigris flew into the air like an arrow shot from a bow, and he disappeared above the clouds. Whether he ever descended again to earth nobody knows, though some chroniclers are certain that he has since been seen there under some other name. What is certain is that he’s never been seen again in a palace where the walls themselves speak the truth.

## XII

Left alone, Zerbino folded his arms and looked at the sea, while Aleli was absorbed by the sweetest thoughts. Isn’t living in enchanted solitude with the person you love the dream of one’s most beautiful days? Aleli took Zerbino’s arm, and they walked about to get to know their new domain. On the right and left, the palace was surrounded by beautiful meadows with gushing water. Emerald oaks, copper beeches, larches with fine cones, and maples with orange leaves cast great shadows over the lawns. In the middle of the foliage, a thrush warbled a song of joy and peace. Aleli put her hand on her heart, and, looking at Zerbino, she said, “My love, are you happy here? Do you have anything more that you desire?”

“I’ve nothing more to desire,” Zerbino responded. “What else can I ask for? Tomorrow I’ll take my axe and set out to work. There are beautiful woods to cut down here, and I can chop down hundreds of branches.”

“Oh!” Aleli sighed. “You don’t love me!”

“Love you!” Zerbino responded. “What is that? I certainly don’t wish you any harm. On the contrary. Here is a palace that’s just appeared from the clouds. It is yours. Write to your father and tell him to come here. It would be a pleasure to see him. If I have caused you any sorrow, it’s not my fault. I didn’t mean to. I was born a woodcutter, and I want to die a woodcutter. That’s my profession, and I know how to keep my place. Don’t cry. I don’t want to say anything to hurt you.”

“Oh, Zerbino!” poor Aleli cried. “What have I done for you to treat me this way? Am I so ugly and nasty that you don’t wish to love me?”

“Love you! That’s not my business. Once again, don’t cry. That doesn’t help. Calm down. Be reasonable. Things will go well. What? More tears? Well, then, yes, if it would give you pleasure, I’d like to love you very much. I love you, Aleli, I adore you!”

Poor Aleli, bathed in tears, raised her eyes. Zerbino was transformed. There was the tender look of a husband, the devotion of a man who has given his heart and life forever to his wife. As soon as she saw this, Aleli began to weep even more than before, but she smiled through her tears at Zerbino, who, for his part, wept for the first time in his life. Isn’t shedding tears without knowing why the greatest pleasure on earth?

Just then the fairy of the waters appeared, leading the sage Mouchamiel by the hand. The good king had been very unhappy without his daughter and his prime minister. He embraced his children tenderly, gave them his blessing, and said farewell to them the same day to take care of his feelings, sensitivity, and health. The fairy of the waters remained the protectress of the couple, who lived a long time in their beautiful palace, happy to forget the world, even happier to have been forgotten by it.

Did Zerbino remain a dunce like his father? Was his mind ever opened by the clear light of the heavens? Could his eyes ever be opened by a single word and was this word ever whispered? It’s a mystery. I don’t know, and I should keep quiet about this. After all, what does it matter? Zerbino was happy. He was loved, and this was the greatest affair of his life. It wasn’t necessary for him to have brains. Whether princess or shepherdess, every woman in a household has enough brains for two.

## ■ Poucinet

Once upon a time there was a peasant who had three sons, Pierre, Paul, and Jack. Pierre was big, fat, red-cheeked, and stupid. Paul was thin, sallow, envious, and wicked. Jack was full of mischief and as fair as a woman, but so tiny that he could have hidden in his father’s large boots. This is why he was called Poucinet or Thumbling.

The peasant had nothing in the world except his family, which he regarded as his treasure. Indeed, they were dirt poor. So, it was a grand day in the cottage when, by chance, they caught sight of half a penny. Rye bread was costly, and life was hard. As soon as the three sons were old enough to work, their father constantly encouraged them to leave the cottage where they had been born and to go out into the world to seek their fortune.

“In other countries,” he used to say, “it’s not always easy to earn a living, but at least there is work, while there’s none here at all, and the only fortunate thing that you can look forward to here is to die of starvation.”

Now, about a mile from the peasant’s cottage, the king lived in a magnificent palace made entirely of wood with twenty carved balconies and six glass windows. And, on a fine summer’s night, a large oak tree with thick branches and foliage suddenly sprang from the ground right against the windows, darkening the entire palace. It was not an easy task to cut down this giant oak, and there was not an axe to be found that could put a dent in its trunk. Moreover, for every branch or root that was cut off, two sprouted forth in its place. Consequently, the king offered three bags of gold coins to anyone who could rid him of this troublesome neighbor, but it was in vain. Exhausted by the struggle, he was forced to have the palace illuminated at midday.

This was not everything. In this country brooks ran from everywhere, but there was no water in the royal palace. In the summer everyone had to wash their hands in beer and to shave with honey. This was a disgrace, and the king promised property, money, and the title of marquis to anyone who could dig a well in the palace courtyard deep enough to furnish water all year round. But no one was able to accomplish this, for the palace was on high ground, with a solid bed of granite an inch below the surface.

Now, two ideas floated into the king’s head, and he wouldn’t let go of them. Though he was just a minor monarch, he was as stubborn and willful as the emperor of China. This is the privilege of royalty. To attain his goal, he posted huge placards stamped with the royal arms throughout his kingdom that offered nothing less than the hand of his daughter, the princess, and half his kingdom to anyone who could cut down the tree and dig the well. The princess was as beautiful as sunshine. Half of a kingdom is never to be sneezed at. And the reward was enough to tempt the most ambitious of men.

From Sweden and Norway, from Denmark and Russia, from Great Britain and the Continent came numerous sturdy workmen, axe on shoulder and pick in hand. But they cut and chopped and dug in vain. Their labor was futile. At every stroke the oak became harder, and the granite did not become softer. As a result, even the most robust workers were forced at last to give up their task.

## II

One day, while all the people in the country were talking about the oak tree and the royal placard, the three brothers decided to go and try their luck as long as their father agreed. On the one hand, they did not count on succeeding and claiming the princess or half of the kingdom. On the other, they thought they might find a position and a good master at the court or elsewhere. That’s all they really needed. Once their father approved of the plan, Pierre, Paul, and Poucinet set out for the king’s palace.

As they walked along the road, Poucinet ran here and there like a hound, noticing and studying everything he saw and poking into every nook and corner. Flies, herbs, and pebbles—nothing escaped his mouselike eyes. He constantly stopped his brothers to ask them the reason for this and that, why the bees flew into the flower cups, why the swallows skimmed the surface of the streams, and why the butterflies flew in zigzag fashion. Pierre laughed at all these questions, while Paul shrugged his shoulders, called him brash and cocky, and told him to keep quiet.

On the way, they entered a large forest of firs that blanketed a mountain. Once they reached the top, they heard the sound of an axe and the crash of falling branches.

"I've always wondered why people cut down trees on the top of a mountain," Poucinet said.

"I'd wonder very much if you didn't wonder," Paul answered harshly. "Ignoramuses find everything wonderful."

"You child! Anyone would think you'd never heard of a woodcutter before," Pierre remarked as he pinched his little brother's cheek.

"No matter," Poucinet replied. "I'm just curious to see what's happening up there."

"Go, then," Paul said, "and tire yourself out. It will be a lesson to you, you conceited imp, always wanting to know more than your big brothers."

Poucinet was not disturbed by this remark. He climbed the mountain, listening for the sound, and making his way in that direction. And, what do you think he found when he reached the top? An enchanted axe, which was cutting down a huge pine tree all by itself.

"Good morning, Madam Axe," Poucinet said. "Aren't you bored living all alone and hacking away at this old tree?"

"My son, I've been waiting many years for you," the axe replied.

"Well, here I am," Poucinet stated.

And, without being at all astonished, he took the axe, put it in his large leather bag, and went merrily down the mountain.

"Did you find anything wonderful up there?" Paul asked with disdain.

"It really was just an axe that we heard," the boy stated.

"I told you so," Pierre said. "You've been sweating for nothing. It would have been better had you stayed with us."

A little farther on, the narrow path wound through masses of jagged rocks with difficulty. In the distance, they heard a sharp sound up on the cliff like iron striking rock.

"I'm surprised that someone is breaking the rock up there," Poucinet said.

“Really,” Paul remarked. “You’re like a chick who’s just crawled out of its shell and has never heard a woodpecker tapping a hollow tree.”

“That’s true,” Pierre said laughing. “It’s nothing but a woodpecker. Stay with us, my boy.”

“I don’t care,” Poucinet responded. “I’m curious to see what’s going on up there.”

And, all at once, he began climbing the rocks on his hands and knees, while Pierre and Paul laughed at him. What do you think he found on reaching the top of the precipice? An enchanted pickaxe, which was hollowing out a huge rock all alone as if it had been butter. The pickaxe penetrated more than a foot with every stroke.

“Good morning, Madam Pickaxe,” Poucinet cried out. “Aren’t you tired of digging up that old rock there all by yourself?”

“I’ve been waiting many years for you, my son,” the pickaxe answered.

“Well, here I am,” Poucinet responded.

And, without showing any astonishment at all, he took the pickaxe, separated the axe from the handle, put the two pieces in his great leather bag, and began walking merrily down the rocks.

“What miracle did Your Lordship find up there?” Paul asked in an ironic tone.

“It was a pickaxe,” the boy replied and went on his way without saying anything more.

Farther on, they came to a brook. The water was cool and clear, and the travelers were thirsty. As they stooped to drink from the hollow of their hands, Poucinet remarked, “I wonder why there is so much water in such a shallow valley. I’d like to know where this brook comes from.”

“Wait and see,” Paul remarked. “One day our impertinent brother will trace everything back to the good Lord. Don’t you know that brooks spring from the ground?”

“No matter,” Poucinet said. “I’m curious to see where this water comes from.”

And, despite the cries and reproaches of his brothers, he followed the stream. On and on he ran, while the stream became narrower and narrower. And, what do you think he found when he reached the end? A walnut shell from which the water spouted and sparkled in the sun.

“Good morning, Madam Spring!” Poucinet cried out. “Aren’t you bored of living all alone in a little corner, spouting water?”

“I’ve been waiting many years for you, my son,” the walnut shell answered.

“Well, here I am!” Poucinet said, and, without the least bit of astonishment, he took the walnut shell, filled it with moss, so that the water could not flow, put it in his great leather bag, and walked merrily down the mountain.

“Do you know now where the brook comes from?” Pierre asked as soon as he saw him.

“Yes, brother, from a little hole,” Poucinet answered.

“This boy is much too bright,” Paul said. “His brains will get him into trouble, and he’ll never live long enough to grow up.”

“I have seen what I wished to see,” Poucinet whispered to himself, “and I know what I wanted to know. I’m satisfied.”

And he rubbed his hands.

## III

At last they reached the king’s palace. The oak was larger and denser than ever before. There was no well in the courtyard, and the large placard still hung at the palace gate, promising the hand of the princess and one half of the kingdom to any noble, commoner, or peasant, if he were to accomplish the two tasks desired by His Majesty. But, since the king was tired of so many useless attempts, which had served no purpose but to drive him to despair, a small placard had been hung under the large one, and on this small placard was written, in red letters,

> *Be it known that the king, His Majesty, in his exceeding goodness, has deigned to announce that anyone who fails to cut down the oak or dig the well shall have his ears cut off on the spot, to teach him to know himself, which is the first lesson of wisdom.*

And, in order that everyone might benefit from this prudent notice, thirty bloody ears were nailed around this placard. They had belonged to those who had been too audacious.

On reading the placard, Pierre burst out laughing, turned up his mustache, and looked at his arms with their great muscles, which were like whipcords. Then he swung his axe twice around his head, and with one blow he cut off one of the largest branches of the accursed tree. But, no sooner had it fallen than two thicker and stronger boughs sprouted right in its place. Consequently, the king's guards seized the unfortunate woodcutter and cut off his ears on the spot.

"You're so clumsy!" Paul exclaimed and, taking his axe, he walked slowly around the tree. When he saw a root springing from the ground, he chopped it off with one blow. Instantly, two enormous roots sprang up in its place, and then a strong branch full of leaves sprouted from the roots.

"Seize this miserable wretch!" the king cried out with rage. "Since he obviously hasn't learned a thing from his brother's example, shave off his ears close to his cheeks!"

No sooner said than done. But the double family misfortune did not terrify Poucinet, who resolutely advanced to try his luck.

"Get that dwarf out of here!" the king commanded. "And if he refuses to go, cut off his ears immediately. That will teach him a lesson and save us from witnessing his foolish action."

"I beg your pardon, Your Majesty, a king's word is sacred," Poucinet said. "I have the right to try. There will be time enough to cut off my ears when I fail."

"Go on, then," the king replied and sighed. "But take care that I don't cut off your nose in the bargain."

So, Poucinet drew the enchanted axe from the bottom of his large leather bag. It was almost as tall as he was, and he had great difficulty in setting it upright with the handle on the ground. "Cut! Cut!" he cried.

And, all at once, the axe cut, chopped, and split, hewing in all directions, right and left, up and down, trunk, branches, and roots. In a quarter of an hour the tree was in pieces, and there was so much wood that the whole palace was warmed by it for more than a year.

When the tree was chopped down and razed, Poucinet approached the king, who was seated with the princess by his side, and bowed gracefully to both.

"Is Your Majesty satisfied with your faithful servant?" he asked.

“Yes,” said the king, “but I must have my well, or watch out for your ears!”

“If Your Majesty will kindly show me where you wish it placed, I will endeavor once more to please my sovereign,” Poucinet answered.

They now went to the large palace courtyard. The king took a raised seat; the princess placed herself a little below her father and began to look with a certain anxiety at the diminutive husband sent by heaven. She had never dreamed of a spouse this tiny. However, Poucinet was not in the least concerned about this. He took the enchanted pickaxe out of his large leather bag. Then he calmly fitted the axe to the handle, and, placing it on the ground at the designated spot, he cried out, “Dig! Dig!”

All at once, the pickaxe splintered the granite, and in less than a quarter of an hour, it dug a well more than a hundred feet deep.

“Does Your Majesty think this cistern large enough?” Poucinet asked with a bow.

“Certainly,” said the king, “but there is no water.” “If Your Majesty will grant me a minute,” Poucinet replied, “your royal impatience will be satisfied.”

Upon saying this, he took the walnut shell, wrapped in moss, from his large leather bag and placed it in a big cistern, which, in default of water, had been filled with flowers. When the walnut shell was firmly embedded in the earth, Poucinet cried, “Gush! Gush!”

And, all at once, the water gushed forth among the flowers with a sweet song, forming a geyser that filled the whole courtyard with its coolness and fell again in a cascade so abundant that in a quarter of an hour the well was full, and it was necessary to dig a channel to avoid this menacing abundance of water.

“Sire,” Poucinet said, bending one knee to the ground before the royal seat, “does Your Majesty think that I have fulfilled your conditions?”

“Yes, Marquis de Poucinet,” the king replied. “I am ready to cede you half my kingdom, or, rather, to pay you what it costs by means of a tax that my faithful subjects will be very happy to raise. However, I can’t give you the princess and take you for my son-in-law. This is another affair, which does not depend on me alone.”

“What must I do?” Poucinet asked proudly while resting his hand on his hip and gazing at the princess.

“You will know tomorrow,” the king said. “Meanwhile, you are to be our guest, and the best chamber in the palace will be made ready for you.”

After the king had departed, Poucinet rushed to find his brothers, who, with their cropped ears, looked like rat terriers.

“Well, brothers,” he remarked, “was I wrong to wonder about everything and to search for the reason things are the way they are?”

“You’ve been lucky,” Paul answered coldly. “Fortune is blind and chooses blindly.”

“You have done well, my boy,” cried Pierre. “With or without ears, I rejoice in your good fortune, and wish our father were here to see it.”

Poucinet led his two brothers away with him, and, since the chamberlain in the castle was kindly disposed toward him, he was able to find a post for the two cropped young men.

## IV

After he retired to his apartments, the king could not sleep. A son-in-law like Poucinet was not very much to his liking. His Majesty sought ways to avoid keeping his word without seeming to break it. For honest men, this is a difficult task. On the other hand, a rogue never hesitates between his honor and his interest, and it is for this very reason that he is a rogue.

In his anxiety, the king summoned Pierre and Paul because only the two brothers could tell him about the birth, character, and manners of Poucinet. Pierre praised his young brother, which did not delight His Majesty very much. Paul put him more at ease by declaring that Poucinet was nothing but an adventurer, and that it would be absurd for a great king to feel himself obliged to such an opportunist.

“My brother is so vain,” the spiteful Paul said, “that he thinks he can defeat a giant in combat. There’s a troll who lives in this region, and he terrorizes everyone and steals sheep and cattle all over the country. Now, Poucinet has repeatedly said that if he liked, he could make this giant his servant.”

“Well, we shall see if he can,” the king said, and after he dismissed the brothers, he had a peaceful sleep.

The next morning, the king sent for Poucinet in the presence of the whole court. And, the little fellow arrived, looking as fair as a lily, as fresh as a rose, and as bright as daylight.

“My future son-in-law,” the king said, weighing his words carefully, “a brave man like you cannot marry a princess without giving her a mansion worthy of her. Now, there is in this forest a troll who, it’s said, is twenty feet tall, and who breakfasts every day on an ox. With a laced coat, a cocked hat, gold epaulets, and a spear fifteen feet long, he would make a porter worthy of a king. My daughter begs you to make her this little gift, after which she will see about giving you her hand.”

“It won’t be easy,” said Poucinet, “but to please Her Highness I’ll try.”

So, he went to the kitchen and put the enchanted axe into his large leather bag, along with a loaf of bread, a piece of cheese, and a knife. Then, he threw the bag over his shoulder and set out for the forest. Pierre wept, but Paul smiled, for he thought that once his brother was gone, he would never return.

Now, as soon as Poucinet entered the forest, he looked to the right and the left, but the tall grass prevented him from seeing. Consequently, he began to sing, at the top of his voice:

> Troll here! Troll there!
> Where are you? Tell me where!
> I want your body or your life!
> Troll here! Troll there!
> You must be fearing for your life!

“And here I am!” the giant bellowed with a dreadful roar. “Wait for me! You’ll make for a nice mouthful.”

“Don’t be in a hurry, my friend,” Poucinet exclaimed in a shrill voice. “I have an hour at your disposal.”

When the troll arrived, he turned his head to all sides and was astonished to see no one. Then he lowered his eyes and saw a young man seated on the trunk of a fallen tree and holding a large leather bag between his knees.

“Was it you who broke up my nap, you good-for-nothing?” the troll cried out and rolled his great flaming eyeballs.

“Yes, my dear fellow,” Poucinet responded. “I have come to hire you as my servant.”

"Ah! Ah!" said the troll, who was as dumb as he was big. "That's a good joke. I'm going to toss you into the crow's nest that I see over there. That will teach you to prowl around in my forest."

"Your forest!" Poucinet responded. "It's more mine than yours. If you say another word, I'll cut down the entire forest in a quarter of an hour."

"Ah!" the giant replied. "I should like to see you do that, my little fellow."

In response, Poucinet placed the axe on the ground and commanded: "Cut! Cut!"

Well, all at once, the axe cut, chopped, split, and hewed to the right and left, and up and down, while the branches came down on the troll like a hailstorm.

"Enough! Enough!" cried the troll, who began to be afraid. "Don't destroy my forest. Who are you?"

"I am the famous sorcerer Poucinet, and I have only to say a word, and my axe will chop off your head. You have no idea yet who I am or how to deal with me! Stay right where you are!"

The troll stood still, greatly intrigued by what he had seen. Poucinet, who was hungry, opened his large leather bag, and took out his bread and cheese.

"What is that white thing?" the troll asked, for he had never seen any cheese.

"It's a stone," said Poucinet, beginning to wolf it down.

"Do you eat stones?" the troll asked.

"Yes, that's my usual food, and it's the reason I don't grow like you because you eat beef. And that's also why I am as small as I am and why I am ten times stronger than you. Take me to your house!"

The troll was conquered. He marched ahead of Poucinet, like a huge dog, and brought him to an immense building.

"Listen," Poucinet said to the giant. "One of us must be the master and the other the servant. Let's make a deal. If I can't do what you can, I'll be your slave. If you can't do what I can, you will be mine."

"Agreed!" the troll said. "I'd very much like to have a little fellow like you to wait on me. I get tired from thinking, and you have brains enough for the two of us. To begin with, here are my two buckets. Go and bring me the water for dinner."

Poucinet raised his head and looked at the buckets, which were two immense barrels, each ten feet high and six feet in diameter. It would have been easier to drown in them than to carry them.

“Ah! Ah!” the troll said as he opened his huge mouth. “You’re already in a pickle, my son. Do what I do, and go draw the water.”

“What’s the use of that?” Poucinet asked. “I’ll go and fetch the spring and turn that into the dinner pot. It will be much easier that way.”

“No, no!” the troll cried. “You’ve already ruined my forest. Don’t meddle with my spring! Tomorrow I’ll be thirsty. Make a fire, and I’ll fetch the water.”

After he hung the dinner pot over the fire, the troll threw an entire ox into it. The ox was cut into pieces with fifty cabbages and a cartload of carrots. He skimmed it with a frying pan and tasted it again and again.

“Come to the table,” he said, “and now let me see you do what I do. For my part, I feel hungry enough to eat this whole ox and you in the bargain. But you will do well for my dessert.”

“All right, let’s sit down at the table,” Poucinet said. But before sitting down, he slipped his large leather bag beneath his jacket so that it fell from his neck to the ground. Now the two of them were at the table. The troll ate and ate, and Poucinet was not far behind him. However, instead of putting the meat, cabbages, and carrots into his mouth, he slipped them into the bag.

“Oh!” the giant cried.” I can’t eat any more. I must undo a button of my waistcoat.”

“Keep eating, you lazy fellow!” Poucinet said as he shoved half a cabbage under his chin.

“Ah!” the troll cried. “I must undo another button. What an ostrich’s stomach you have! Anyone can see that you’re accustomed to eating stones.”

“Go on!” Poucinet said and slipped a huge piece of beef out of sight.

“Ooof!” the troll exclaimed. “I’ve undone my third button. I feel stuffed. And how are you doing, sorcerer?”

“Bah!” Poucinet replied. “Nothing is easier than to get a little air.” So he took his knife and slit his jacket and bag the whole length of the stomach. “It’s your turn,” he said to the troll. “Do what I do!”

“No, I’d rather be your humble servant,” the troll answered. “I can’t digest steel.”

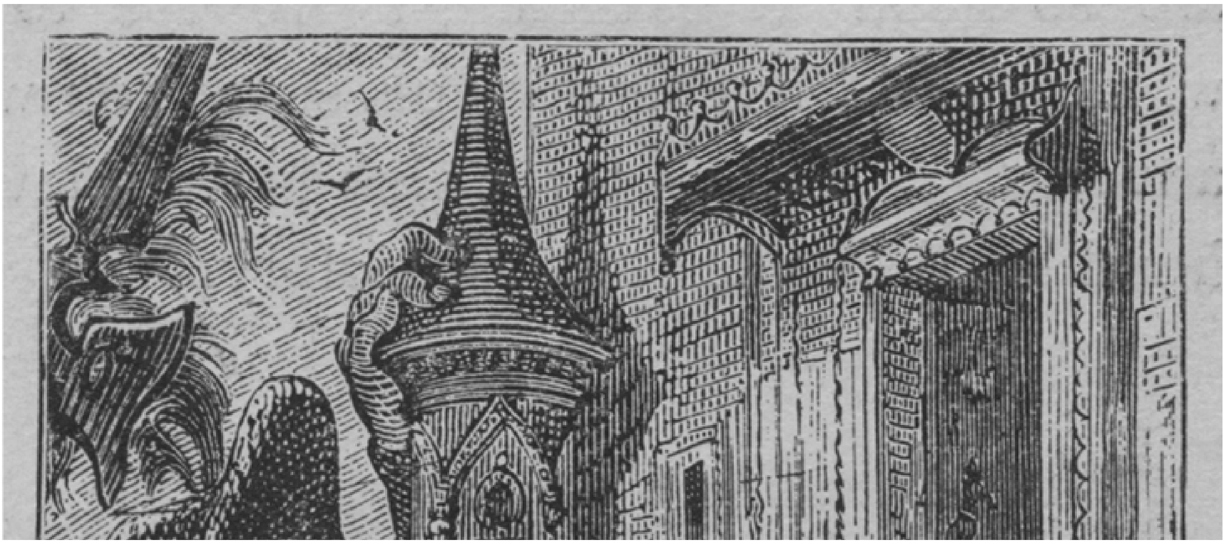
No sooner said than done. The troll kissed his little master’s hand as a sign of submission. Then, lifting him on one shoulder and a large bag of gold on the other, he set out for the palace.

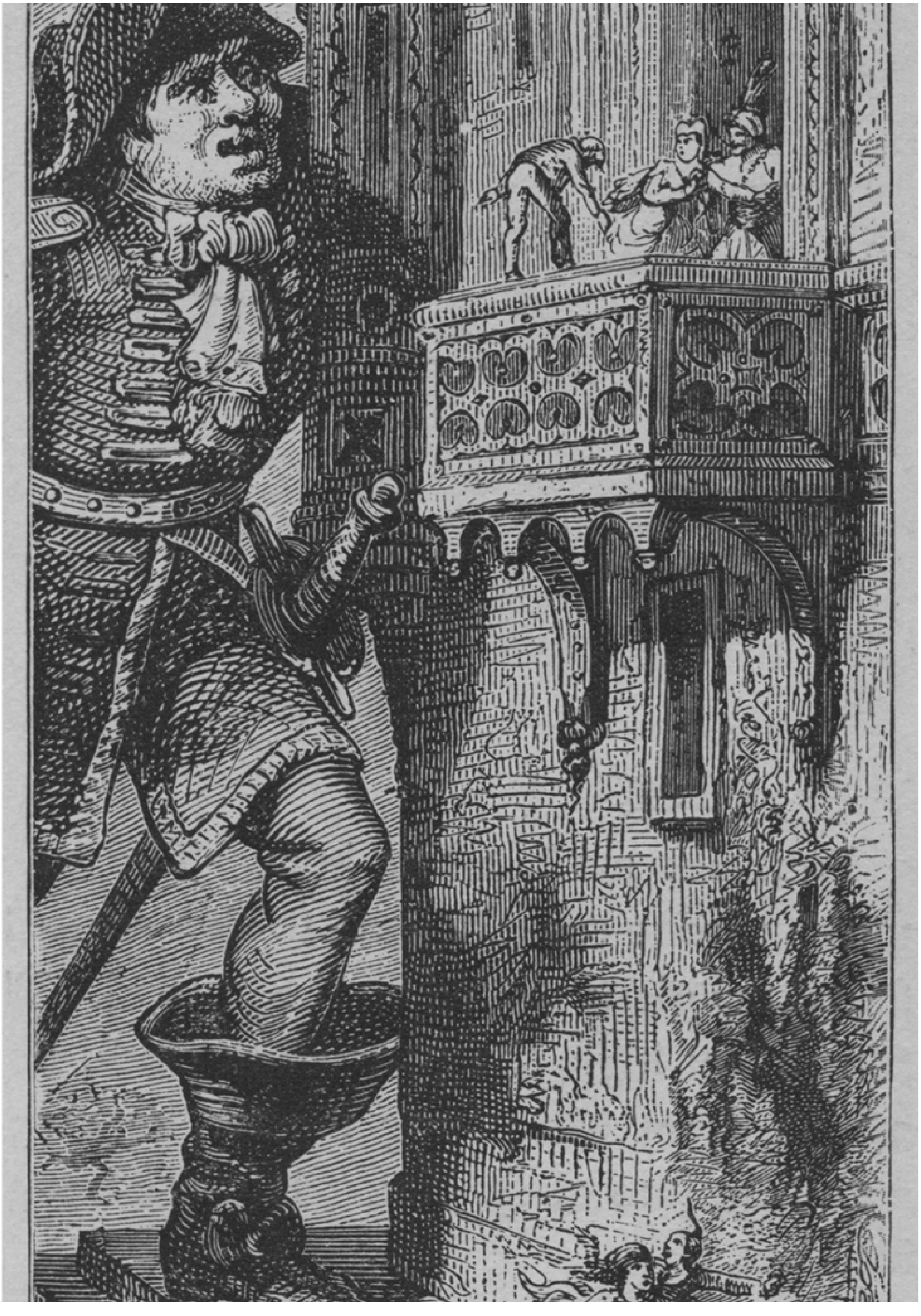
## V

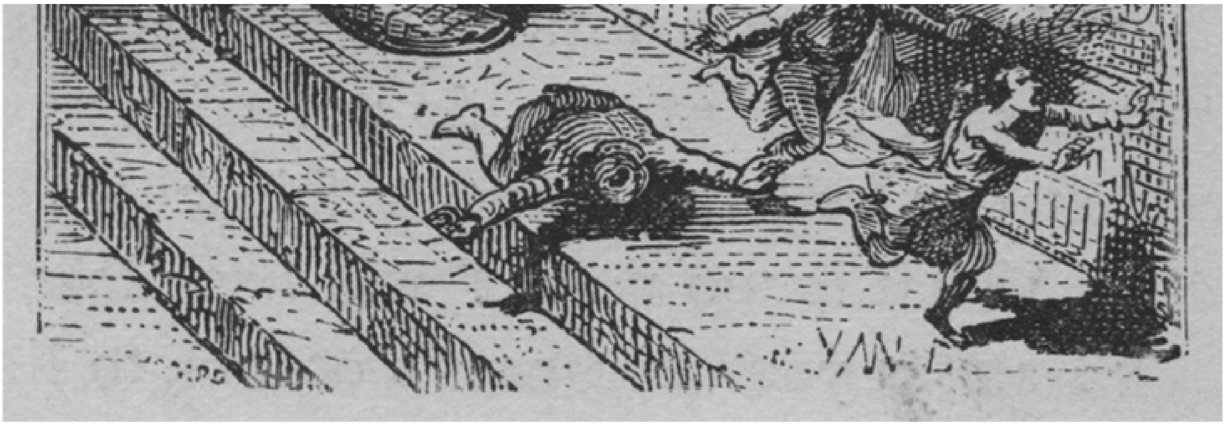
There was a banquet at the palace, and no one was thinking any more about Poucinet, for they all thought that the troll had eaten him a week ago. Then, suddenly, there was a terrible crash that shook the building to its foundation. It was the troll, who had found the large gate too low for him and had knocked it down with one blow of his foot.

Everyone ran to the window, the king with the rest of the people, and saw Poucinet calmly seated on the shoulder of his terrifying servant, on a level with the second-story balcony, where the court was assembled. He stepped down among them, and, bending his knee before his betrothed, said, “Princess, you wished for a slave. Here are two of them.”

This gallant speech, which was inserted the next day in the royal newspaper, *Gazette de la Cour*, embarrassed the king a good deal the moment it was spoken. Not knowing how to respond, he drew the princess to a window and said, “My daughter, I have no reason to reject your marriage to this daring young man. Sacrifice yourself, for state reasons! Princesses do not marry for the feelings of their heart alone.”







“I beg your pardon,” she responded with a curtsy. “Princess or not, every woman wishes to marry to suit her taste. Permit me to defend my rights in my own way.”

“Poucinet,” she added aloud, “you are brave and successful, but that is not sufficient to please the ladies.”

“I know it,” Poucinet answered. “It’s also necessary to do their will and bend to their whims.”

“You are a bright fellow,” the princess said. “And, since you are so good at guessing, I propose a final test, which shouldn’t frighten you, since you will have me for your adversary. Let us now compete to see who is the cleverer, you or I. My hand will be the prize in the contest.”

Poucinet made a low bow. The whole court descended to the throne room, where, to everyone’s dread, they found the troll seated on the ground. Since the ceiling was only fifteen feet high, the poor troll could not stand upright. At a sign from his young master, he crept to his side, proud and happy to obey him. It was strength in the service of brains.

“We will begin with an extravagant game,” the princess declared. “It is said that women are not afraid of telling lies. Let us see which of us can tell the better lie. The one who first cries, ‘That is too much!’ will have lost.”

“Whether to tell fibs, or to speak the truth in earnest,” Poucinet answered. “I am always at Your Royal Highness’s command.”

“I am sure,” said the princess, “that your farm is not as large as ours. When two shepherds blow their horns at each end of the land, neither can hear the other.”

“That is nothing,” Poucinet replied. “My father’s estate is so vast that a heifer, just two months old when she enters the gate on one side, is a full-grown milk cow when she leaves it on the other.”

“That does not astonish me,” the princess said. “But you haven’t had such an enormous bull as ours. Two men seated on its horns cannot touch each other with a twenty-foot pole.”

“That is nothing,” Poucinet answered. “The head of my father’s bull is so large that a servant perched on one horn cannot see the man sitting on the other.”

“That doesn’t surprise me,” the princess said. “But you don’t have as much milk as we have. In fact, every day we fill twenty barrels, each a hundred feet in height, and then we build a mountain of cheese every week as high as the great pyramid of Egypt.”

“What’s so surprising about that?” Poucinet declared. “In my father’s dairy they make such mammoth cheese that one day our mare fell into the mold, and it took us a week to find her. The poor animal had broken her back, and I was forced to replace her spine with a large fir tree, which worked admirably. But one fine morning a branch sprouted out of the fir tree, which grew so tall that I reached the sky when I climbed it. Then I saw a lady dressed in white spinning thread from the foam of the sea. When I grabbed hold of it, I heard a crack! It had snapped, and I fell into a mouse hole. And who do you think I found there? It was your father and my mother, each with a distaff, and your father was so clumsy that my mother boxed his ears until his mustache trembled.”

“That is too much!” the furious princess cried. “My father has never subjected himself to such an indignity.”

“She’s said, ‘That’s too much!’ ” the troll exclaimed. “Master, the princess is ours.”

## VI

“Not yet,” the princess said and blushed. “Poucinet, I have three riddles to ask you. Guess them, and nothing will be left for me to do but to obey my father. So, now tell me, what is that which is always falling and is never broken?”

“Ah!” said Poucinet. “My mother told me that long ago. It’s a waterfall.”

“That’s true,” the troll said. “Who would have guessed that?”

“Tell me,” the princess said in a more trembling voice, “what is it that travels the same road every day, yet never retraces its steps?”

“Ah!” answered Poucinet. “My mother taught me that long ago. It’s the sun.”

“That’s correct,” said the princess, pale with anger. “One last question remains: What is it that you think and I don’t? What is it that I think and you don’t? What is it that we both think, and what is it that neither of us thinks?”

Poucinet lowered his head and reflected. He was embarrassed.

“Master,” the troll said, “if the question is too hard, don’t rack your brains about it. Make a sign, and I’ll carry off the princess in a minute.”

“Be silent, slave,” Poucinet answered. “Force can accomplish nothing, my poor fellow, you ought to know this by now. Let me try some other means.” Then, after a profound silence, he said, “Madam, I hardly dare guess the answer to your riddle, in which, nevertheless, I glimpse my happiness. I ventured to think that your words would not puzzle me, while you justly thought the contrary. You are good enough to think that I am not unworthy of your favor, while I’m not bold enough to think so. Finally, what we both think,” he added smiling, “is that there are greater fools in the world than we are, and what neither of us thinks is that the king, your august father, and this poor troll have as much—”

“Silence!” the princess cried. “Here is my hand.”

“What is it that you think about me?” the king asked. “I’d like to know.”

“My good father,” the princess said as she embraced him, “we think that you are the wisest of kings and the best of men.”

“Well, I knew that before,” the king said. “Meanwhile, I must do something for my good people. Poucinet, I appoint you to the rank of duke.”

“Long live my master, Duke Poucinet!” the troll cried in such a loud voice that people thought a thunderbolt had struck the palace. Fortunately, the only harm done was a general panic and a score of broken windowpanes.

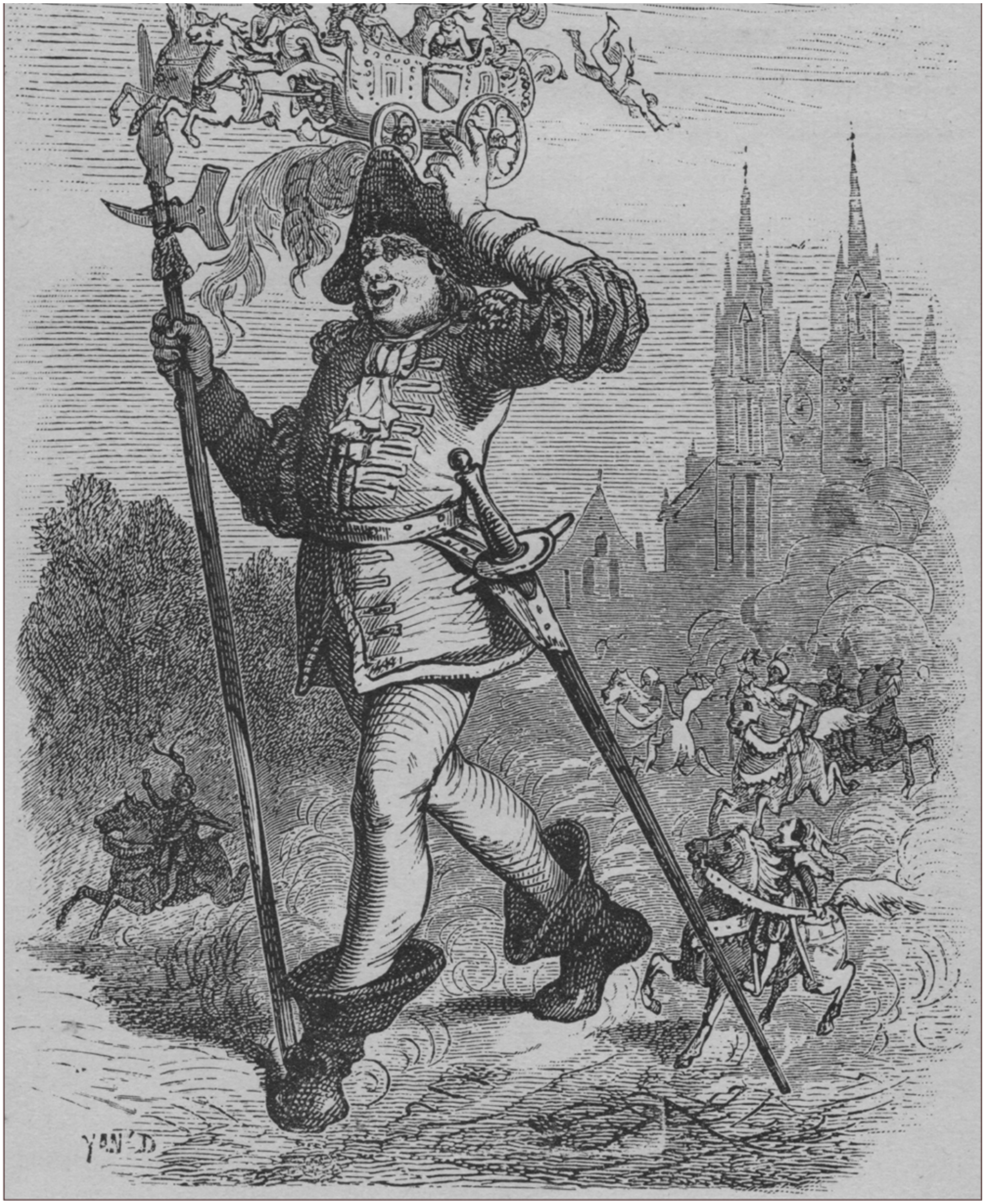
## VII

It is futile to describe the wedding of the princess and Poucinet, for all weddings are alike. The only difference is in the day after. Nevertheless, it would be inexcusable on the part of a faithful historian not to tell how much interest the troll's presence added to the magnificent festivities. For example, when he left the church, the faithful troll was exuberant and could think of nothing better to do than to pick up the bridal carriage, put it on his head, and carry the pair in triumph back to the palace. This is one of the incidents that should be noted since it is a sight not seen every day.

The festivities continued that evening. Feasting, speech making, poems, illuminations, fireworks, flowers, and bouquets—nothing was lacking. There was universal rejoicing.

In the palace, everyone was laughing, singing, eating, drinking, or talking. One man alone, lurking in a corner, amused himself in a different way from the rest. This was Paul, and he was glad that his ears had been cut off because he was made deaf and was unable to hear the praises lavished on his brother. He wished that he were also blind so that he couldn't see the happy faces of the bride and bridegroom. Finally, he fled to the woods, where he was devoured by bears. I wish that all envious people might share his fate.

Poucinet was so small that it seemed hard at first for him to command respect. However, his affability and gentleness soon gained the love of his wife and the affection of all his people. After the death of his father-in-law, he occupied the throne for fifty-two years without anyone for a single day desiring a revolution. Incredible as this fact may seem, it is nevertheless testified by the official chronicle of his reign. He was so clever, this chronicle tells us, that he always understood what would serve and please his subjects, and so kind that the pleasure of others was his chief joy. He lived solely for the good of those about him.



But why praise his goodness? Isn’t this the virtue of sensible people? Whatever may be said, there is no such thing on earth as stupid people who are good. I’m only talking about fools with two legs and without a feather. When one is stupid, he is not good, and when one is good, he is not stupid. Trust my long experience. If all the fools in the world are not wicked—which I doubt—all the wicked are fools. This is the moral of my story, and if anybody finds a better one, let him go and tell it in Rome.

## ■ The Young Woman Who Was Wiser than the Emperor

Once upon a time there was a poor man who lived in a hut with his very wise and diligent daughter. She went everywhere in search of alms and also taught her father to speak in an educated way so he could obtain what he needed. One day he happened to go to the emperor to request something. Surprised by his fine manner of speaking, the emperor asked him who he was, and who had taught him to express himself in such a fine and cultured way.

"It was my daughter," he responded.

"And who taught your daughter?" the emperor asked.

"It was God who taught her, as well as our extreme misery," the poor man replied.

Then the emperor gave him thirty eggs and said: "Take these thirty eggs to your daughter and tell her to hatch chicks from them. If she doesn't succeed, she'll be in trouble."

The poor man returned to his hut in tears and told his daughter what had happened. She recognized at once that the eggs were boiled. Nevertheless, she told her father to go to bed, and she would take care of everything. So, he followed her advice and went to bed. Meanwhile, his daughter took a pot, filled it with water and beans, and hung it over the fire. The next morning, when the beans had been boiled, she called her father and told him to take a plough and oxen and churn up the soil by the side of the road where the emperor was likely to pass.

"And," she added, "when you see the emperor, take these beans, sow them, and then say in a loud voice, 'Move on, my oxen! May God protect me and make my boiled beans grow!' Then, if the emperor asks how boiled beans could grow like that, you’re to answer that it’s just as easy as hatching a chick from a hard-boiled egg.”

The poor man did what his daughter told him to do: he left the hut, ploughed the ground, and sowed the beans. When he saw the emperor, he cried out, “May God help me and make my boiled beans grow!”

As soon as the emperor heard these words, he stopped along the way and said, “You miserable fool, how’s it possible to make boiled beans grow?”

And the poor man replied, “Gracious emperor, it’s just as easy as hatching a chick from a boiled egg.”

The emperor suspected that the poor man’s daughter had prepared her father to give this answer. Consequently, he ordered his valets to bring the poor man before him. Then he gave him a small package of hemp and said, “Take this, and make sails and cords out of it and all that is necessary for a vessel, or else I’ll have your head cut off.”

The poor man was greatly troubled by this command. With tears in his eyes, he took the package and returned to his daughter. After he reported what had happened, she told him to go to bed and let her take care of everything. The next day she took a tiny piece of wood, woke her father, and said, “Take this match to the emperor, and ask him to make a spindle, a shuttle, and a loom from it. Once he does this, I’ll do what he asks.”

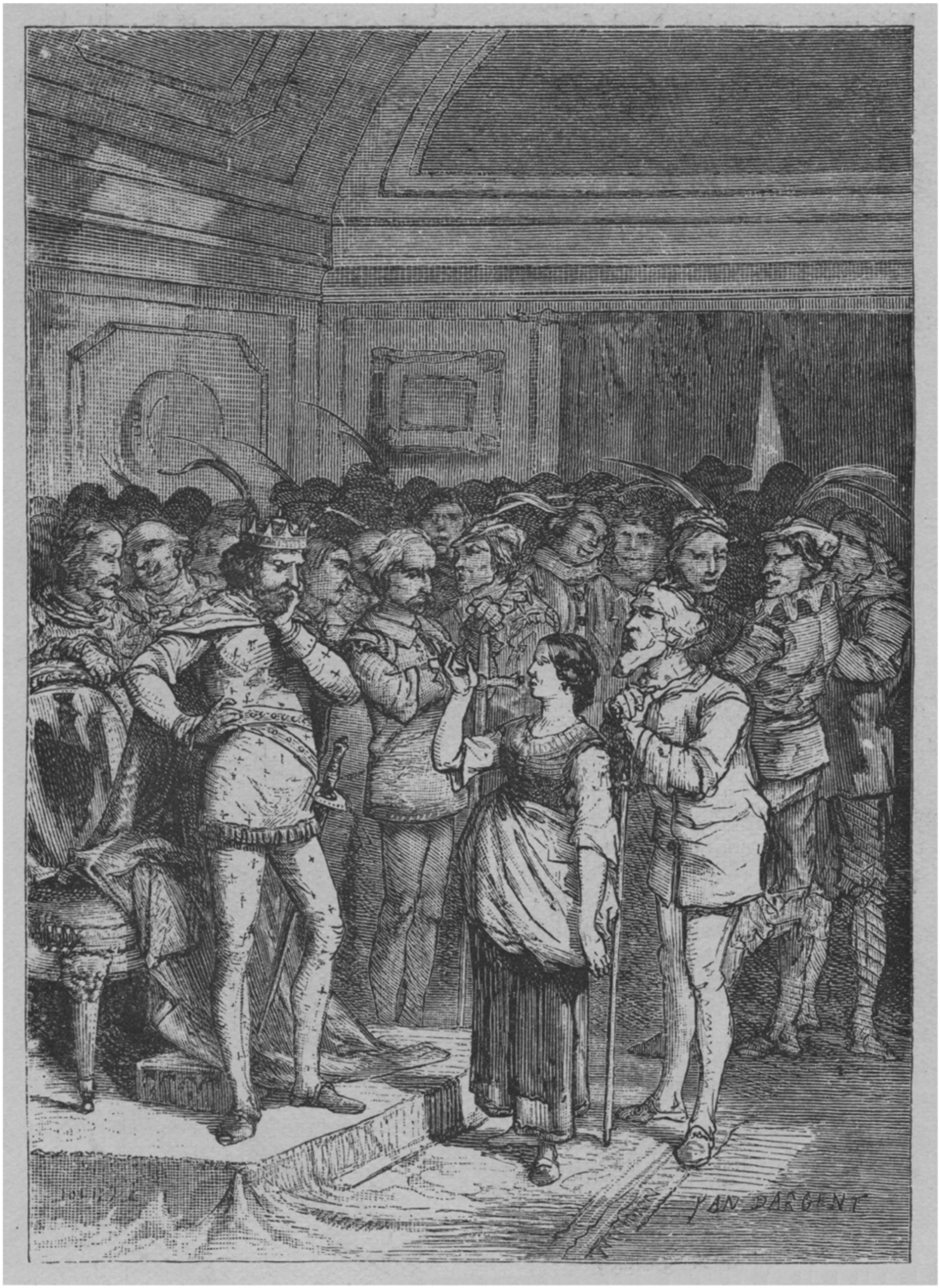
Once more, the poor man followed his daughter’s advice. He went to the emperor and repeated what she had taught him to say. When the emperor heard this, he was astonished. Then, after thinking about his next step, he took a glass cup, gave it to the poor man, and said, “Take this glass cup to your daughter, and tell her to empty the ocean with this cup so that it is an arable field.”

Sobbing, the poor man obeyed and carried the glass cup to his daughter. As soon as he was with her, he repeated the emperor’s command word for word. Again, she told him to go to bed and let her take care of everything. The next day she called him, gave him a pound of tow, and said, “Take this to the emperor and tell him to stuff all the springs and the mouths of all the rivers so they will be blocked. After he does that, I shall dry out the sea.”

And the poor man went and repeated all this to the emperor once again.

After hearing this, the emperor realized that the maiden was wiser than he was. Therefore, he ordered her to appear before him, and after the father brought his daughter and the two of them bowed before him, the emperor said, “My girl, tell me what sounds can be heard the farthest from here.”

“Thunder and lies, gracious emperor,” the maiden answered.


YAN DARGENT

Then the emperor took hold of his beard, turned to his councilors, and said, “Guess how much my beard is worth.”

After they had all guessed its value, some more and others less, the maiden declared to their faces that none of them were correct. Instead, she declared, “An emperor’s beard is worth three rainfalls in a summer’s drought.”

The emperor was delighted and said, “She has guessed best of all.”

Then he asked her if she would be his wife, adding that he would not let her go until she consented. The maiden curtsied and said, “Gracious emperor, may your will be done! I only ask that you write a letter in your own hand on a piece of paper stating that if at any time you grow sick and tired of me and want to separate from me and send me from the palace, I shall have the right to take with me what I love the most.”

The emperor consented and gave her a letter sealed with red wax and the official grand stamp of the empire.

Well, after some had passed, the emperor happened to grow tired of his wife, just as she had imagined he would, and he said to her, “I don’t want you to be my wife any longer. You are to leave my palace, and go wherever you want.”

“My illustrious emperor,” the empress responded, “your will is my command. Permit me only to stay here one night more, and tomorrow I shall leave the palace.”

The emperor agreed to this request, and before dinner, the empress mixed brandy and sweet herbs with the wine and persuaded him to drink it.

“Drink and be merry,” she said. “Tomorrow we part, and, believe me, I shall be happier on this day than on the day you married me.”

No sooner had the emperor drunk the wine than he fell fast asleep. Immediately thereafter, the empress told several servants to carry him at once to a carriage that she had ready and took him with her to a stone grotto. When the emperor awoke in this grotto, he rubbed his eyes, looked around him, and cried out, “Where am I? Who brought me here?”

“I did,” the empress responded.

“Why did you do this? Didn’t I tell you that you are no longer my wife?”

“It’s true you said this,” she replied while handing him a paper, “but don’t you remember what you granted me in this letter? You stated that if we separate, I have the right to take with me whatever I love the most in the palace.”

When the emperor heard these words, he embraced her, and they returned to the palace, never more to part.

# ■ Briam the Fool

Once upon a time in the good country of Iceland, there lived a king and queen who ruled a faithful and obedient people. The queen was kind and gentle, and people rarely talked about her. On the other hand, the king was greedy and cruel. Consequently, all those who feared him felt they had to celebrate his virtue and kindness over and over again. Thanks to his avarice, the king had more castles, farms, herds, goods, and jewels than he could count, but the more he possessed, the more he wanted. Pity the man, rich or poor, who fell under his power!

On the outskirts of the park that surrounded the royal castle there was a cottage that was the home of an old peasant and his wife. Heaven had bestowed on them seven children, who were their only treasure. To feed this large family, the good people had just one cow, called Bukolla. She was a splendid animal, black and white, with small horns, and gentle large eyes. Her beauty, however, was the least of her qualities. She was milked three times a day, and she never gave less than five gallons of milk each time. She was so accustomed to her masters that she came home of her own accord at milking time, dragging her full udders and bellowing from a distance to signal that it was time for them to come and relieve her. In short, she was the pride and joy of the family.

One day, when the king went hunting, he passed through the pasture where the royal cows were grazing. As chance would have it, Bukolla had strayed and mixed among the herd.

“What a beautiful cow I have there!” the king exclaimed.

“Sire,” the cowherd answered, “it’s not yours. It’s Bukolla, the cow, and belongs to the old peasant who lives in that shack over there.”

“I want her,” the king said, and during the entire hunt, he talked of nothing but Bukolla. Upon return to his castle in the evening, he called the captain of his guard, who was just as wicked as he was, and said, “Go find that peasant, and bring me the cow that I like this very instant.”

The queen begged him not to do anything. “These poor people have nothing in the world but their cow,” she said. “If you take her away, they will die of starvation.”

“I must have her,” the king replied. “It doesn’t matter whether I buy the cow, barter for her, or use force to obtain her. If Bukolla is not in my stables within an hour, there will be hell to pay for those who have failed their duty!”

And he frowned in such a menacing way that the queen did not dare to open her mouth, and the captain of the guards departed as quickly as he could with a troop of soldiers.

In the meantime, the peasant was busy milking Bukolla in front of the hut, and all his children had gathered around and were caressing her. Upon receiving the king’s message from the captain of the guards, the good man shook his head and said that he would not sell Bukolla at any price.

“She is mine,” he said. “She’s my pride and joy. I love her more than all the king’s cows and his gold.”

Neither threats nor pleas could make him change his mind. It was growing late, and the captain of the guards feared his master’s wrath. Consequently, he grabbed Bukolla’s halter to drag her away. The peasant stood up to resist when an axe hit him, and he fell dead to the ground. At this dreadful sight, all the children began to sob except Briam, the eldest, who stood, still and speechless.

The captain of the guards knew that blood for blood was the law in Iceland, and that sooner or later the son would avenge his father. If one didn’t want the tree to grow again, one must rip it from its roots and soil. So, in a frenzy, the vicious ruffian grabbed one of the crying children and asked, “Where is your pain?”

“Here,” said the child, placing his hand on his heart. In an instant, the villain plunged a dagger into his breast. He asked the same question six times, and six times he received the same answer. Then, six times he flung the corpse of each son upon that of the father. While all this was happening, Briam, with his vacant eyes and mouth wide open, ran about and chased the flies as they buzzed in the air.

“And you, you fool! Where is your pain?” the executioner shouted.

Briam’s only answer was to turn his back and to smack his rear end with his hands while singing:

It’s there that my mother, angry one day,
Scolded and kicked so hard to my dismay
That I fell to the ground on my face in fear,
Wounded in front, wounded in the rear,
My loins bruised completely, my nose fully broken!

The captain of the guards ran after the insolent Briam, but his companions stopped him.

“Forget it!” they cried. “Kill the cub after the wolf, but don’t kill a fool! What harm can he do?”

That evening the king had the pleasure of petting Bukolla, but it never crossed his mind that she had cost him too much.

Not far from the palace in the meager hut, tears flowed down the cheeks of an old woman who asked God for justice. The king’s whim had taken her husband and six children from her in only an hour’s time. Of all her children, whom she had loved, and of all left to live, none remained except a miserable idiot.

## II

Soon thereafter, everyone in the vicinity of ten miles talked about Briam and his antics. One day, he wanted to pound a spoke in the wheel of the sun. The next day, he threw his cap in the air to cover the moon. The king, who was ambitious, wanted to keep a fool at his court to resemble those of the great princes on the Continent. Consequently, Briam was soon sent for and dressed in a multicolored suit with one leg red and the other blue, one sleeve green and the other yellow, and an orange body. He looked like a parrot in this costume, and it was his duty to amuse the courtiers and relieve their boredom. Sometimes hugged but more often beaten, the poor fool suffered everything without complaint. He spent entire hours talking with the birds or watching the burial of an ant. If he opened his mouth, it was to say something foolish, and those who were not the subject of his remarks felt delighted and relieved.

One day, when dinner was about to be served, the captain of the guards entered the royal kitchen. Briam, armed with a chopping knife, was cutting up carrot leaves in the form of parsley. The sight of the knife scared the murderer, and his suspicions shook his heart.

“Briam, where is your mother?” he asked.

“My mother?” the idiot responded. “She’s hanging over there.” And he pointed with his finger at the huge pot, where the royal dinner was stewing.

“Stupid fool, what do you mean?” the captain of the guards exclaimed and pointed to the pot. “Open your eyes!”

“That’s my mother because it feeds me,” Briam responded and immediately threw down the chopping knife and jumped over to the fireplace. Then he grabbed the sooty pot in his arms and ran off with it into the forest. The guards chased him, but it was labor lost. When they finally caught him, everything had been broken and spoiled. That night the king was forced to dine on a crust of bread, and his only consolation was to have Briam soundly whipped by the kitchen hands.

Totally bruised with welts, Briam returned to his mother’s hut and told her what had happened.

“My son, my son,” the poor woman remarked, “that’s not what you should have said.”

“What should I have said, Mother?”

“My son, you should have said, ‘This is the pot filled every day by the king’s generosity.’ ”

“Very good, Mother, I’ll say that tomorrow.”

The next day, when the court was assembled, the king began talking with his majordomo. He was a good-looking gentleman, who loved good living. He was fat and jolly with a large, bald head, a thick neck, and a huge belly that prevented him from crossing his arms. In addition, his little legs could support this vast edifice only with great difficulty. While the majordomo was talking with the king, Briam struck him with a hard blow in the belly and said, “This is the pot filled every day by the king’s generosity.”

Needless to say, Briam was given a sound beating after saying this. The king was furious, and the court likewise. However, word spread throughout the castle in the evening that fools, without knowing it, sometimes speak the truth.

Totally bruised, Briam returned to his mother’s hut and told her what had happened.

“My son, my son,” the poor woman advised him, “that’s not what you should have said.”

“What should I have said, Mother?”

“My son, you should have said, ‘This is the kindest and most faithful of courtiers.’ ”

“Well, Mother, I’ll say that tomorrow.”

The next day, the king held a grand morning reception, and while the ministers, officers, chamberlains, well-bred gentlemen, and fair ladies fought to gain a smile from the monarch, he amused himself by teasing a large spaniel that was trying to snatch a biscuit from his hands.

Briam seated himself at the king’s feet and grabbed the dog by the nape of its neck, causing it to howl and make a horrible grimace. Then Briam declared: “This is the kindest and most faithful of courtiers.”

The king smiled at this jest, and the courtiers all burst out laughing, almost splitting their sides, but no sooner did the king leave the room than a shower of blows and kicks rained upon poor Briam, who had great difficulty in escaping the storm.

Totally bruised, Briam returned to his mother’s hut and told her what had happened.

“My son, my son,” the poor woman declared, “that’s not what you should have said.”

“What should I have said, Mother?”

“You should have said, ‘Here is someone who would eat up everything if one would let her.’ ”

“Very good, Mother. I’ll say that tomorrow.”

The next day was a holiday, and the queen appeared in her most gorgeous array. She was covered with velvet, laces, and jewels. Her necklace alone was worth the tax of twenty villages. Everyone admired such splendor.

All of a sudden, Briam cried out: “Here is someone who would eat up everything if one would let her.”

It would have been the end of the insolent Briam if the queen herself had not interceded for him.

“Poor fool,” she said. “Leave here immediately before anyone harms you. If you only knew how these jewels weigh me down, you would not reproach me for wearing them.”

Briam rushed back to his mother’s hut and told her what had happened.

“My son, my son,” the poor woman consoled him, “that’s not what you should have said.”

“What should I have said, Mother?”

“You should have said, ‘Here is the king’s pride and love.’ ”

“Very good, Mother. I’ll say this tomorrow.”

The next day, the king was going on a hunt. His favorite mare was brought to him. After he had mounted the horse and was casually saying goodbye to the queen, Briam patted the horse on the shoulder and said, “Here is the king’s pride and love.”

The king gave Briam a cross look, causing the poor fool to run off as fast his legs could carry him, for he had already begun to sense the beatings he might receive. As he entered his mother’s hut out of breath, he told her what had happened.

“My son,” his poor mother warned, “don’t go back to the castle. Otherwise, they will kill you.”

“Patience, Mother, nobody can say who will murder and who will be murdered.”

“Alas!” his mother wept and responded. “How fortunate that your father is dead and cannot see your shame and mine!”

“Patience, Mother, the days that follow one another are never alike.”

## III

Nearly three months after Briam’s father had been laid in the grave alongside his six sons, the king arranged a grand banquet to honor the chief officers of his court. The captain of the guards sat on his right and the chubby majordomo on his left. The table was covered with fruits, flowers, and lights, and the guests drank the most exquisite wine from golden goblets. The drinks went to their heads, and the people talked very loudly. Already more than one quarrel had flared up. Briam played the fool more than ever. He poured the wine and didn’t leave one glass empty, but while he held the golden flagon with one hand, he pinned together the hems of the clothes worn by the guests. He did this two at a time so that no one could stand up without dragging his neighbor with him. After Briam made the round of the table three times, the king was inebriated by the wine and cried out: “Jump on the table, fool, and amuse us with your songs!”

Briam sprang and landed lightly among the fruits and flowers. Then he began singing in a muffled voice:

Each dog has his turn,
Wind and rain,
Night and day,
Death and life,
Each dog has his turn.

“What do you mean by this gloomy song?” exclaimed the king. “Fool, make me laugh, or I’ll make you cry.”

Briam looked at the king fiercely and sang in a menacing voice:

Each dog has his turn,
Good luck or bad,
The fates are silent.
Outrage and vengeance,
Each dog has his turn.

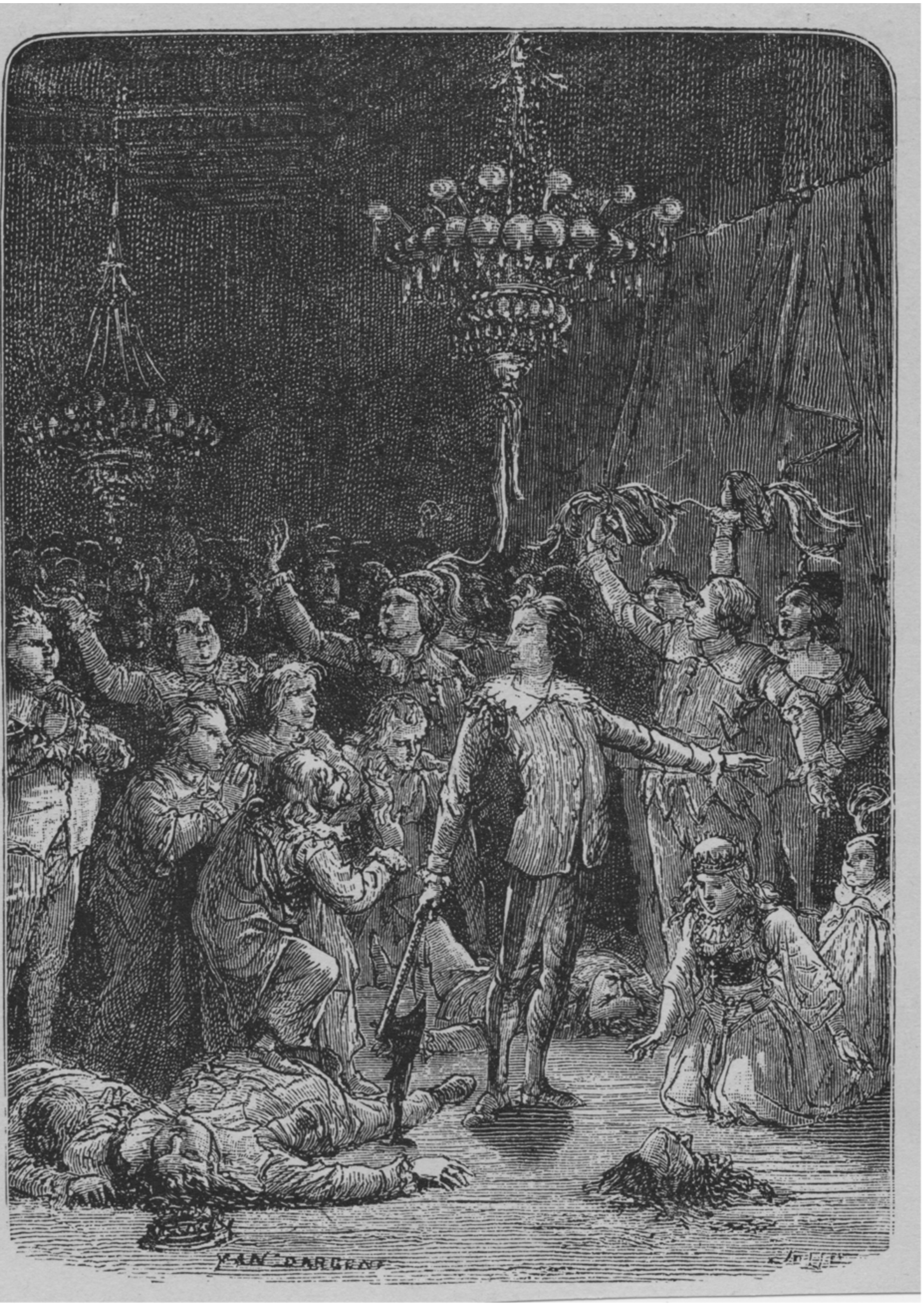
“How weird!” cried the king. “I think that you’re threatening me, you scoundrel! So, I’m going to punish you as you deserve.”

He rose to his feet so suddenly that he dragged the captain of the guards with him. The captain was so startled that, to steady himself, he grabbed hold of the king’s arm and neck.

“You miserable wretch!” cried the king. “How dare you lay hands on your master?”

All at once, the king seized his dagger and was about to stab the officer when the captain grabbed the king’s arm with one hand, and, with the other, plunged his knife into the king’s throat. Blood gushed forth in torrents, and the king fell, dragging his murderer with him in his final convulsions.

The captain of the guards rose quickly amid shrieks and tumult, and, drawing his sword, he exclaimed, “Gentlemen, the tyrant is dead! Long live liberty. I proclaim myself king and will marry the queen. If anyone objects, let him speak. I’m waiting!”


YAN DARGENT

"Long live the king!" all the courtiers cried, and there were even a few who profited from the occasion and pulled a petition from their pockets. The joy was universal and almost delirious. Suddenly, Briam stood before the captain of the guards with terrifying eyes and uplifted axe.

"Dog, and son of a dog!" he cried. "When you slew my father and brothers, you had no fear of God nor man. Defend yourself!"

The captain of the guards attempted to protect himself, but Briam dealt his right arm such a furious blow that it suddenly hung like a broken branch.

"And now," Briam shouted, "if you have a son, tell him to avenge you, as Briam this day avenges his father."

Then he split the captain's head in two.

"Long live Briam!" cried the courtiers. "Long live our liberator!"

Just at that moment, the queen entered. She was very alarmed and threw herself at the fool's feet, calling him her avenger. Briam raised her from the ground, and then, seating himself by her side and brandishing his bloody axe, he invited all the courtiers to swear fidelity to their lawful sovereign.

"Long live the queen!" all the guests exclaimed.

The joy was universal and almost delirious. The queen wanted to keep Briam at the court, but he asked her just to let him return to his hut and requested no other reward than the poor cow, the innocent cause of all the troubles.

Later, on approaching the door of the hut, the cow began to moo loudly for those who could no longer hear her. Then the poor woman came out in tears.

"Mother," said Briam, "here is Bukolla. You are avenged!"

## IV

And this is the end of the story. What became of Briam? Nobody knows. But everyone in the country can still point out the ruins of the hut where Briam and his brothers had once lived. Mothers tell their children: "There's the home of the young man who avenged his father and consoled his mother."

And the children respond: “We shall do the same!”

# ■ The Little Gray Man

In olden days, about three or four hundred years ago, there was an old peasant who lived in Skalholt, and it was obvious that he was not richly endowed with brains or money. One time, when the good man was attending church, he heard an inspiring sermon on charity.

“Give alms, my brothers, give alms!” the priest said. “And the Lord will repay you a hundredfold.”

These words, which were repeated very often in the sermon, seeped into the peasant’s head and muddled what little brains he had. Consequently, soon after he had returned home, he began to cut down the trees in his garden, dig up the ground, and fetch wood and stones, as if he were about to build a palace.

“What are you doing, my poor man?” his wife asked.

“Don’t call me ‘poor man’ any longer,” the peasant replied in a solemn tone. “We are rich, my dear wife, or, at least, we shall be soon. In two weeks I’m going to give away my cow… .”

“Our only means of livelihood!” his wife screamed. “We shall die of starvation.”

“Hold your tongue, you ignoramus!” the peasant responded. “It’s quite evident that you didn’t listen to the priest’s sermon in Latin. By giving away our cow, we’ll receive a hundred more as a reward. The curate said so, and it’s the gospel truth. I intend to put fifty of them in the stable that I am going to build, and with the money that I get for the other fifty, I’ll buy enough grazing land to feed our herd during the summer and the winter as well. We’ll become richer than the king.”

And, without troubling himself much about his wife’s pleas and reproaches, the simpleton began building his stable and astonished his neighbors. Once the work was finished, he tied a rope around the cow’s neck and led her straight to the priest’s home, where he found him talking with two strangers. Of course, the peasant scarcely glanced at them because he was so eager to make his gift and receive the promised reward. The priest was greatly surprised by this new form of charity. So, he talked at length to the imbecile to demonstrate that the Lord had only spoken about spiritual rewards. Nothing more. However, it was a sheer waste of time, for the peasant merely repeated, “You said so, Father! You said so!”

Soon the priest became tired of trying to reason with such a dope. Consequently, he exploded in a fit of holy wrath and shut his door in the face of the peasant, who stood on the road dumbfounded and kept repeating, “You said so, Father! You said so!”

The peasant had no choice but to return home, and this was not easy because it was early spring. The ice was melting, and gusts of wind blew the snow in all directions. He slipped with each step he took, while the cow bellowed and refused to move very much. At the end of an hour, the peasant became lost and thought he was going to die. He was puzzled and had to stop. Then he began cursing his bad luck and didn’t know what to do with the animal that he was dragging along. While he was sadly considering his next step, a man appeared carrying a large sack, and he asked the peasant what he was doing outside in such bad weather. In reply, the peasant recounted his troubles.

“My good man,” the stranger said, “if I have any advice to give you, it’s to trade with me. Since I live nearby, give me your cow, which you’ll never get home anyway, and take this sack, which is not very heavy. Indeed, it’s well-padded and full of good things.”

Once they agreed to the exchange, the stranger led the cow away, while the peasant threw the sack over his shoulder. However, he found it terribly heavy. Moreover, he dreaded his wife’s reproaches and ridicule. So, the instant he entered the house, he immediately told her about the danger he had encountered and how smart he was in exchanging a dying cow for a sack full of treasures. Upon hearing this pretty story, his wife began to snarl. But he begged her to keep her bad mood to herself and to begin cooking her largest pot of stew on the hearth.

“You’ll see what I’ve brought,” he repeated. “Wait a little, and you will thank me.”

Upon saying this, he opened the sack, and out stepped a little man, dressed all in gray just like a mouse.

"How are you, my good people?" he asked with the pride of a prince. "Ah, I hope that, instead of cooking me, you'll give me something to eat. This little journey has made me very hungry."

The peasant fell off his bench as if he had been struck by lightning.

"There!" his wife declared. "I was sure it would turn out this way. Another one of your crazy deals! But what else can one expect from a husband like you? You've lost the cow, which was our only means of livelihood, and now that we have nothing, you bring us another mouth to feed. I wish you had remained in the snow with your sack and your treasure."

The good woman would have kept talking forever if the little gray man had not reprimanded her and reminded her three times that hard words would not fill the pot, and that the wisest course was to go and hunt for game. Consequently, in spite of the darkness, wind, and snow, he departed right away and soon came back with a large sheep.

"There!" he said. "Kill this animal, and don't let us die of starvation."

The old peasant and his wife looked suspiciously at the little man and his booty. This godsend, which seemed to have tumbled from the skies, smelled strongly of theft. But when hunger speaks, goodbye to scruples. Whether the sheep was procured legally or not, it was devoured with great relish.

From that day onward, the peasant's dwelling was always abundantly supplied with food. One sheep followed another, and the good old man, more credulous than ever, wondered whether he hadn't profited from the exchange he had made with the stranger. Instead of the hundred cows that he had expected to gain, heaven had sent him a skillful supplier of food in the figure of the little gray man.

Of course, every coin has two sides to it. While the sheep multiplied in the old man's house, they perceptibly diminished in the royal flock, which grazed in a meadow nearby. The head shepherd became very troubled by this and informed the king that, for some time, in spite of his increased vigilance, the finest sheep in the flock had disappeared one after another. He was certain that some clever thief had settled down nearby. Indeed, it didn't take long to discover that there was a stranger living in the peasant's home. Nobody knew him, and nobody knew where he came from. Consequently, the king ordered the stranger to be brought before him right away. In turn, the little gray man set out without batting an eyelid, but the peasant and his wife began to feel a little remorse as they began thinking that receivers of stolen goods and thieves were hanged on the same gallows.

When the little gray man appeared at court, the king asked him whether, by chance, he had heard that five fat sheep had been stolen from the royal flock.

“Yes, Your Majesty,” answered the little man, “I was the one who took them.”

“By what right?” the king asked.

“Your Majesty, I took them because an old man and his wife were suffering from hunger, while you, oh, king, were rolling in abundant wealth and couldn’t consume one tenth of your income. It seemed to me fair and just for you to share your surplus with these honest people rather than have them die of want, especially because you don’t know what to do with your great wealth.”

The king was stunned by such audacity. Then, he stared at the little man in a manner that boded no good and declared: “As far as I can see, your chief talent is stealing.”

In reply, the little man bowed with modest pride.

“Very well!” the king said. “You deserve to be hanged, but I’ll forgive you on condition that, by this time tomorrow, you will have stolen my black bull from my shepherds, who tell me that they guard them with great care.”

“Your Majesty, you ask an impossibility. How do you expect me to deceive such vigilance?”

“If you don’t,” the king responded, “you will be hanged.”

And, with a brusque signal of his hand, he dismissed the thief, while all the courtiers in attendance repeated the king’s words: “Hanged! Hanged! Hanged!”

Now, the little gray man returned to the peasant’s hut, where he was kindly greeted by the old man and his wife. However, he only told them that he needed a rope, and that he had to leave the next morning at daybreak. After they gave him the cow’s old halter, he went to bed and slept peacefully.

At the crack of dawn, the little gray man set out with his rope. He went into the forest along a path that the king's shepherds always passed, and, after he chose a large oak tree, well in sight of everyone, he hanged himself by the neck on the largest branch. However, he made sure not to make a noose. Soon thereafter, two shepherds came by, leading the black bull.

"Look!" one of them cried out. "The rogue has already received his reward. At least it's certain that he didn't steal the halter. Goodbye, my funny fellow! You won't be stealing the king's bull."

No sooner did the shepherds move out of sight than the little gray man jumped down from the tree, ran to a crossroad, and hanged himself again on a large oak tree near the road. The shepherds were astonished to see another man hanged.

"Who's that?" one of the shepherds exclaimed. "Am I seeing double? Here's the man who was hanging back there."

"How stupid you are!" his companion replied. "How can a man be hanged in two places at the same time? This is just another thief, that's all."

"I'm telling you that it's the same one," the first shepherd insisted. "I recognize him by his coat and his face."

"And I'll bet that it's someone else," said the second shepherd, who always thought he was right.

Well, once the bet was made, the two shepherds tied the bull to a tree and ran back to the first oak tree. No sooner were they out of sight than the little gray man leaped from the branch of the tree and stealthily led the bull to the peasant's cottage, where he was welcomed with joy. Then the animal was put into the stable until it could be sold.

The two shepherds returned at night to the castle with their heads hung and a dejected air. The king saw at once that they had been tricked. So, he sent for the little gray man, who presented himself with the serenity of a gracious hero.

"It's you who have stolen my bull, isn't it?" said the king.

"Your Majesty," the little man answered, "I was only obeying your command."

"Very well!" the king said. "Here are ten gold crowns for you so that you'll return the bull, but if, in two days, you don't steal the sheet off my bed while I am asleep, I will hang you."

"Your Majesty, don't ask such a thing. You're too well guarded for a poor man like me to be able even to approach the castle."

"If you don't do it," the king declared, "I shall have the pleasure of hanging you."

When evening came, the little gray man, who had returned to the cottage, took a long rope and a basket, which he lined with moss. Then he put a cat that had just given birth to kittens into the basket with her entire litter. Groping his way through the thick darkness, he slipped into the castle and climbed to the roof without being seen.

To enter the garret, he sawed through a plank of the floor and dropped down through this opening into the king's chamber. All this did not take much time for our skillful friend. Once there, he carefully turned down the quilt and laid the cat and kittens in the royal bed. He then clambered up the bedpost and sat down on the canopy. It was from this position above that he waited to watch what would happen.

When the palace clock struck eleven, the king and queen entered their apartment. Once they had undressed, they knelt down and said their prayers. Afterward, the king put out the light, and the queen got into bed. All at once, she shrieked and sprang from the bed into the middle of the room.

"Are you mad?" the king yelled. "Do you want to alarm the whole castle?"

"My dear," she answered, "don't come near the bed, I beg of you. I felt a burning breath there, and my feet touched something furry."

"Why the devil don't you tell me what's in the bed?" the king laughed pitifully. "All women have the heart of a hare and a bird brain."

Upon saying this, he bravely submerged himself beneath the cover like a true hero and instantly jumped out of the bed dragging the cat, which had dug its claws into his thigh. As soon as the guard heard the king's shrieks, he rushed to the door and knocked three times with his spear as a signal that help was at hand.

"Silence!" the king cried. He was ashamed of his weakness and didn't want to be caught looking as frightened as he did. Quickly he struck a match, lit the lamp, and saw the cat, tenderly licking her kittens in the bed.

“This is too much!” he cried. “This impudent animal has no respect for our crown. Instead, she uses our royal bed to deposit her entire litter. Just wait, puss, and I’ll give you what you deserve!”

“She’ll bite you,” the queen admonished. “She may be mad.” “Don’t be afraid, my dear!” the good king assured her, and, raising the corners of the sheet, he wrapped the whole litter in it. Once that was done, he rolled the litter in the quilt and sheet, made a huge bundle, and threw it out the window.

“Now, we are avenged,” he said to the queen. “Let us go to your room and sleep in peace.”

Sleep was what the king needed! Indeed, he was lulled to sleep by pleasant dreams, but while he rested, a man climbed to the top of the roof. Once there, he tied a rope to a post and let himself down to the ground. Then he grabbed the bundle, put it on his back, escaped through a window, leaped over a wall, and ran off through the snow. The guards reported the next morning that a phantom had flitted before their eyes, and that they had heard the cries of a newborn child.

When the king awoke the next morning, he collected his thoughts and began to reflect calmly. For the first time, he suspected that he had been the victim of some trick and that the perpetrator was the little gray man. Consequently, he sent for him at once.

The little gray man came and was carrying the sheet, cover, and freshly ironed quilt on his back. He kneeled before the queen and said in a respectful tone: “Your Majesty knows that I was only obeying the king’s orders. I hope that you will be good enough to forgive me.”

“Very well,” the queen replied, “but never do it again, or I’ll die from fright.”

“But what about me? I don’t forgive you,” said the king, very irritated that the queen should take it upon herself to show clemency without consulting her lord and master. “Listen to me, you three-time scoundrel. If by tomorrow night you haven’t stolen the queen herself from my castle, you’ll be hanged the next day.”

“Your Majesty!” the little man exclaimed. “Hang me immediately, and spare me twenty-four hours of anguish. How do you expect me to succeed in such an undertaking? It would be easier to pull down the moon with my teeth.”

“That’s your business and not mine,” the king responded. “Meanwhile, I shall order my men to set up the gallows.”

The little gray man left the palace in despair. He buried his face in his hands and sobbed so much that his heart was ready to burst.

In the meantime, the king laughed for the first time. Toward dusk, a holy Capuchin monk came to the castle with his rosary in hand and his sack on his back. According to custom, he was gathering alms for his convent. When the queen gave him some, he said, “Madam, God will reward your charity. Even now, I am bringing you recompense. Tomorrow, as you well know, a poor soul, who is doubtless guilty, is to be hanged in the castle.”

“Alas!” the queen replied. “I pardon him and would gladly save his life.”

“That cannot be,” the monk said. “But this man, who is some kind of sorcerer, may make you a valuable gift before he dies. I know that he possesses three marvelous secrets. Just one alone is worth a kingdom. I’ve heard that he may bequeath one of them to the gracious lady who’s taken pity on him.”

“What are these secrets?” the queen asked.

“By virtue of the first, a woman can make her husband do whatever she chooses.”

“Ah!” the queen replied, shrugging her shoulders. “There is nothing wonderful about that recipe. From the time of the blessed Eve, this mystery has been handed down from mother to daughter. What’s the second secret?”

“The second one provides wisdom and kindness to the recipient.”

“Indeed!” the queen commented in an absent-minded way. “And the third?”

“The third guarantees that the woman who possesses it will have incomparable beauty and the gift of remaining so until she dies.”

“Father, that’s the secret I want!” cried the queen.

“It’s easy to obtain,” the monk assured her. “Here is what must happen: while the sorcerer is still free and before he dies, he must take both your hands and blow three times upon your hair.”

“Have him come!” the queen exclaimed. “Father, go and fetch him.”

“It’s impossible to do,” said the monk. “The king has given the strictest orders that this man shall not enter the castle. If he sets foot within these walls, he will die. Don’t deprive him of the few hours he has to live.”

“But, Father, the king has forbidden me to leave the palace until tomorrow evening.”

“That’s unfortunate,” the monk said. “It’s clear that you must give up this priceless treasure. It would be sweet, however, never to grow old, but always to remain young and beautiful, and, above all, always beloved.”

“Alas, Father! You are quite right. The king’s command is the height of injustice. But even if I should attempt to leave, the guards would stop me. Don’t look so astonished. You see how whimsically the king treats me. I am the most unfortunate of women.”

“My heart goes out to you,” the monk said. “What tyranny! What barbarism! Well, madam, you should not submit to such unreasonable demands. Your duty is to do as you wish.”

“But how can I do this?”

“There is one way, if you believe in your rights. Get into this sack, and I’ll carry you out of the castle at the risk of my life. Fifty years from now, when you are as young and beautiful as you are today, you will applaud yourself for resisting a tyrant’s will.”

“Very well,” the queen said. “But can you assure me that this isn’t some trap?”

“Madam,” the holy man said, raising his hands to heaven and beating his breast, “I’m as sure as I am a monk. You have nothing to fear. Besides, I will stay by your side all the time you are with this unfortunate man.”

“And you will bring me back to the castle?”

“I swear it.”

“And with the secret?” the queen added.

“With the secret,” the monk replied. “But if Your Majesty has any misgivings, stay here and let the secret die with the sorcerer, unless he chooses to give it to some other woman who trusts him.”

To show her answer, the queen bravely crawled into the sack. Then the monk pulled the strings together, threw the bundle over his shoulder, and crossed the courtyard with cautious steps. On his way, he met the king, who was making his rounds.

“Judging by appearances,” he said, “the alms must have been good today.”

“Sire,” the monk answered, “Your Majesty’s generosity is inexhaustible, and I fear that I have abused it. Perhaps I had better leave this sack and its contents.”

“No! No!” the king said. “Carry it away, Father, and good riddance to it. I can’t imagine that all you have there is worth much. It will make for a meager supper.”

“I wish Your Majesty will also dine with a good appetite,” the monk replied, as he went away, muttering some bitter words under his breath. When the supper bell rang, the king entered the dining room, rubbing his hands. He was satisfied with himself, and he hoped to have vengeance, a double reason to whet his appetite.

“The queen’s not down yet!” he said sarcastically. “However, that doesn’t surprise me. Unpunctuality is the virtue of women.”

He was about to sit down to the table, when three soldiers entered, crossing their spears, and driving before them the little gray man.

“Sire,” one of the guards said, “this clown has had the audacity to enter the courtyard of the castle in spite of the royal command. We would have hanged him on the spot without disturbing Your Majesty’s supper, but he claims that he has a message from the queen, and that he is the bearer of a state secret.”

“The queen!” cried the king, amazed. “Where is she, you miserable creature? What have you done with her?”

“I have stolen her,” the little man coldly replied.

“But how?” the king asked.

“Sire, that monk with the huge sack on his back and to whom Your Majesty deigned to say, ‘Take it away, and good riddance to it …’ ”

“Was that you?” the king asked. “You miserable wretch! There’s no longer any safety for me. One of these days you will take me away—and my kingdom as well.”

“Sire, I come to ask you for more than that.”

“You frighten me,” the king responded. “Who are you, a sorcerer, or the devil in person?”

“No, sire. I am simply the Prince of Holar. You have a marriageable daughter, and I was on my way to ask for her hand, when bad weather forced me and my squire to take refuge with the priest of Skalholt. While there, I happened to encounter an idiotic peasant, who made me play the part you know. As for the rest, I have done everything only to obey and please Your Majesty.”

“All right,” the king said. “I understand, or, rather, I don’t understand. No matter. Prince Holar, I would rather have you for a son-in-law than a neighbor. As soon as the queen has arrived …”

“Sire, she is here. I ordered my squire to bring her to the palace.”

The queen soon entered, a little confused but easily consoled by the thought that she would have such a clever son-in-law.

“And the famous secret,” she whispered to the Prince of Holar, “you owe it to me.”

“The secret of eternal beauty,” the prince replied, “is to always be loved.”

“And the way to always be loved?” the queen asked.

“Is to be good and simple, and to do your husband’s will.”

“He dares say that he’s a sorcerer!” said the queen, indignantly raising her hands to heaven.

“Enough of these mysteries!” cried the king, who was beginning to be anxious. “Prince Holar, when you marry our daughter, you will have more time than you will want to chat with your mother-in-law. The dinner is getting cold. Let us sit down at the table. Amuse yourself, my son-in-law! Give the evening over to pleasure! Tomorrow you will be married.”

At these words, which he thought charming, the king looked at the queen, who answered with such a frown that he instantly began to rub his chin and watch the flies on the ceiling.

Here is the end of the adventures of Prince Holar. Happy days have no history. We know, however, that he succeeded his father-in-law, and that he was a great king. Something of a liar and something of a thief. Bold and cunning, he had the virtues of a conqueror. He captured and occupied more than a thousand miles of snow taken from his neighbors that he lost and won three times sacrificing half a dozen armies. Accordingly, his name figures gloriously in the celebrated annals of Skalholt and Holar, and for more information we refer our readers to these famous documents.

# ■ The Lazy Spinner

There was once a woman whose daughter was very lazy and not disposed to do any kind of work. One time her exasperated mother took her to the forest near a crossroad and began to beat her with all her might. As she was doing this, a prince happened to pass that way and asked the mother why she was punishing the girl in such a brutal manner.

"My lord," she responded, "it's because our daughter is an unbearable hard worker. She spins everything, even the moss that grows on the walls."

"Let me take charge of her," the prince said. "I'll provide her with as much flax as she desires to spin."

''Take her!" the mother responded. "Take her! I don't want her anymore."

The prince led the young woman to his home, delighted with such a beautiful acquisition. That very same evening, he locked the young maiden alone in a chamber with a huge pile of flax. Consequently, she was in great trouble and cried out: "What am I going to do? I don't want to spin! I don't know how to spin!"

Then, toward evening, three old witches tapped the window-pane, and she quickly let them in.

"If you will invite us to your wedding," they said, "we will help you spin this evening."

"Spin, ladies!" she quickly responded. "I'll certainly invite you to my wedding."

And all at once, the three witches began to spin, and they spun all the flax that was lying there while the lazy maiden slept comfortably.

In the morning, when the prince entered the room, he saw the whole wall hung with skeins of thread and the maiden, asleep. Then he left the room on tiptoe and forbade anyone to enter so that the maiden could rest after such hard work. This did not prevent him from sending a second huge load of flax to the room on the same day. The witches returned that evening and finished the work as they had the night before.

The prince was amazed, and since there was nothing more to spin in the palace, he said to the young maiden, “You are indeed the queen of all spinners, and I want to marry you.”

On the evening before the wedding, the so-called spinner said to the prince, “I should like to invite my aunts.”

And the prince responded that they would be welcome.

Once they entered the hall, the three witches gathered around the stove. They were hideous to behold, and when the prince saw how ugly they were, he said to his bride, “Your aunts are not very pretty.”

Then, he approached the first witch and asked her why she had such a long nose.

“My dear nephew,” she answered, “it is through spinning so much. When one spins all the time and wags her head all day long, the nose grows gradually very long.”

The prince went to the second witch and asked why her lips were so thick.

“My dear nephew,” she said, “it is through spinning so much. When one spins the whole day and moistens the thread all day long, the lips grow gradually thick.”

He then asked the third why she was so humpbacked.

“My dear nephew,” she said, “it is through spinning so much. When one sits bent over her work all day long, the back becomes gradually humped.”

Upon hearing this, the prince became very afraid that through spinning, his wife might look as horrible as these three fates. Consequently, he threw both spindle and distaff into the fire. Now I’ll let those women who are very much like our lazy spinner guess whether the young maiden became angry about this.

My tale is finished.

# ■ The Language of Animals

There was once a shepherd who had served his master zealously and faithfully for many years. One day, as he was keeping watch over the sheep, he heard some hissing that came from the woods. Curious to know what it was, he entered the forest and followed the sound. As he approached the spot of the noise, he saw that the dry grass and dead leaves had caught fire, making a blazing circle, and in the middle he saw a serpent hissing. The shepherd stopped to see what the serpent would do as the flames were quickly closing in upon it. The moment the serpent noticed the shepherd, it cried out, “In God’s name, save me from the fire!”

The shepherd extended his staff over the flames to the snake, which wrapped itself around it and slid onto his hand. Then it moved from his hand to his throat, around which it coiled itself like a necklace. As soon as this happened, the shepherd was scared and exclaimed, “What bad luck! Have I saved you only to perish?”

“Don’t be afraid,” the snake answered. “Just carry me back to my father, the King of the Serpents.”

The shepherd tried to excuse himself by saying that he could not leave his flock without somebody to keep guard, but the serpent responded, “Don’t worry about your sheep. No harm will come to them. Just hurry as fast as you can.”

So, the shepherd ran through the forest with the snake coiled around his neck until he reached a gate made of adders interlaced together. The serpent gave a hiss, causing the adders to separate and make way for them to pass. The serpent then said to the shepherd, “When we reach the castle, my father will offer you anything you desire: silver, gold, jewels, and all the most precious treasures of earth. Don’t accept any of them. Just tell him that you want to learn the language of animals. At first he’ll refuse this favor, but after some time, he’ll grant it.”

While they were talking, they reached the castle and were met by the King of the Serpents, who exclaimed with tears in his eyes, “In God’s name, my child, where have you been?”

The serpent told her father how she had been surrounded by fire and how the shepherd had saved her. The King of the Serpents then turned to the shepherd and said, “What may I give you for saving my daughter?”

“Teach me the language of animals,” the shepherd answered, “so I may converse with all of nature on this earth as you do.”

“That would be worthless for you,” the king said. “If I were to help you understand this language, and you were to tell anyone how you learned it, you would die on the spot. Ask me for something that will be of better use to you, and it will be yours.”

“If you wish to reward me,” the shepherd replied, “teach me the language of animals. If not, adieu, and may God be with you! I don’t want anything else.”

He pretended that he was leaving when the king called him back and said, “Stop! Come here! Since you insist upon it, open your mouth.”

The shepherd did as he was told, and the king blew into his mouth and said, “Now blow in turn in mine.”

When they had blown into each other’s mouths three times, the king said, “Now you will understand the language of animals. May God be with you, but if you care for your life, beware of betraying the secret because you will be a dead man if you say a word about it to anyone.”

When the shepherd returned to his flock and passed through the woods, he heard what the birds, the insects, and everything on the earth were saying. On reaching his flock, he found the sheep safe and in good condition. Then he stretched himself on the ground for a nap and was about to fall asleep when he overheard two crows perched on the branch of a tree speaking in their own language: “It’s a shame that the shepherd doesn’t know there’s a cavern full of gold and silver just under the spot where that black lamb is standing.”

No sooner did the shepherd hear this than he went and told his master. Then they brought a wagon and dug until they found the door to the cavern as well the treasure, which they carried away. Since the master was a man of honor, he gave the entire treasure to the shepherd and said, “This treasure is yours. It was God who gave it to you.”

The shepherd took the money, built a house, found a wife, and lived happy and content. He soon became the richest man, not only in the village, but in the region. There was not one man within ten miles who could compete with him. He had land, money, and flocks of sheep and herds of cattle and horses with a shepherd for each flock and herd. On Christmas Eve, he said to his wife, “Get a good stock of wine, brandy, and food ready. Tomorrow we’ll take everything to the farm so that the shepherds can enjoy themselves.” His wife followed his orders and prepared everything he wanted. The next day, when they were at the farm in the evening, the master said to all the shepherds, “My friends, gather around. Eat, drink, and enjoy yourselves. I shall watch the flocks and herds tonight in your place.”

He did as he said and looked after the flocks and herds. At midnight, while he was keeping guard, the wolves began to howl and the dogs to bark. The wolves said in their language, “Let us come in and destroy the sheep and cows, and there will be plenty of fresh meat for you.”

And the dogs answered in their language, “Come in. We shall be glad for once to eat our fill.”

But among the dogs there was an old mastiff with only two fangs in his jaws, and this dog said to the wolves, “As long as my two fangs are left, you won’t be doing anything to harm my master.”

Well, the master heard and understood everything. When morning came, he ordered all the dogs, except the old mastiff, to be taken out and shot. The astonished shepherds protested and said, “Master, it’s a great pity to do this.”

But the master responded brusquely, “Do as I say.”

Then he made preparations to set out for home with his wife. The husband mounted a handsome gray horse, and the wife, a mare, completely covered by the long folds of her dress. During the ride the husband took the lead, and the wife was in the rear. At one point the gray horse turned and said to the mare, “Get going! Move faster! Why are you trotting so slowly?”

“Oh, it’s easy enough for you to go fast with only my master to carry, but I’m carrying my mistress along with all her necklaces, bracelets, skirts, petticoats, satchels, and key bags without end. They really need four oxen to carry all these things.”

The husband turned and laughed. His wife noticed it and spurred her mare to move faster. Once she overtook her husband, she asked him why he had laughed.

“It was nothing,” he said. “Just a foolish thought that entered my mind.”

His wife did not like his response and insisted on knowing why he had laughed. However, he resisted and wouldn’t tell her.

“Leave me in peace, woman! What’s it to you? My God! I really don’t know myself why I laughed.”

But the more he refused to tell her, the more she insisted on knowing the cause of his cheerfulness. Finally, he said to her, “Listen, I want you to know that if I reveal what made me laugh, I will die immediately.”

Even this did not stop his wife, who tormented her husband more than ever to tell her. Eventually they reached their home, and after dismounting from his horse, the husband ordered one of the servants to bring him a coffin. As soon as it was ready, he had it set before the house and said to his wife, “Watch me. I’m going to get into this coffin, and then I’ll tell you why I was laughing, but the instant I speak, I’ll be a dead man.”

So, he got into the coffin, and as he took a last look around him, he saw the old dog from the farm approaching him, with tears in its eyes. When the poor man saw this, he called his wife and said, “Get a piece of bread, and give it to the dog.”

When she got the bread, she flung it to the dog, but it did not even look at it. However, the barnyard cock ran up and began pecking at it. Consequently, the dog exclaimed, “You miserable glutton! How can you eat something when you see that our master is about to die?”

“Let him die,” the cock replied, “if he is fool enough to do so. I have a hundred wives. I call them all when I find a kernel of corn and swallow it as soon as they get there. If any one of them should take it into her head to complain, I would peck her to teach her a lesson. Our master has only one wife, but not brains enough to take charge of her.”

No sooner did the husband hear this than he leaped from the coffin, grabbed a stick, and called his wife into the house.

“Come,” he said, “and I’ll tell you what you want to know so much.”

He then explained everything with the stick, and as each blow fell, he cried, “This is it, wife! This is it!”

Indeed, this is the way he responded to her, and ever since then, his wife has never asked her husband why he laughed.

# ■ The Prudent Farmer

Once upon a time there was a farmer who lived near Ragusa and dabbled a little in buying and trading at the market. One day he went to the city to make a few purchases and took all his money with him. When he reached a crossroad, he stopped and asked an old man who was standing there which route he should take.

"I'll tell you if you give me a hundred crowns and no less," the stranger answered. "Every piece of advice I give is worth a hundred crowns."

"May the devil take you!" the farmer thought as he studied the stranger's appearance. The farmer was worried because he looked like a fox. "What kind of advice can be worth a hundred crowns? It must be something very rare. Generally, you can get plenty of advice for nothing. It's true that it's not worth much more than you give for it." So, after reflecting, he said to the old man, "All right, tell me. Here is your money."

"Listen carefully," resumed the stranger, "the straight road that you see before you is the road of the present. The other one, which makes a curve, is the road of the future. I have some more advice to give you," he added, "but for that you must pay me another hundred crowns."

The farmer reflected again for a long time, but finally he thought to himself, "Since I've bought the first advice, I may as well buy the second." And he gave another hundred crowns.

"Listen," said the stranger, "if you stop at an inn during a trip and the host is old and the wine is new, leave quickly, if you want to escape any harm… . Now, give me another hundred crowns, for I still have something more to tell you."

The farmer began reflecting again. "What can this new piece of advice be? Bah! Since I've already bought two, I may as well buy the third one."

And he gave his last hundred crowns.

“Listen carefully,” the old man said again. “If you ever get angry, keep half of your anger for the future, and don’t use up all your rage in one day.”

After everything was said and done, the farmer returned home empty-handed.

“What did you buy?” his wife asked.

“Nothing but three pieces of advice, each of which cost me a hundred crowns,” he answered.

“Well, that’s just like you, wasting your money, and throwing it to the wind as usual!”

“My dear wife,” the farmer said gently, “I don’t regret what I did with my money. Just listen to the advice that I bought.”

And he told her what the old man said to him. However, his wife shrugged her shoulders and called her husband a fool, who would ruin his home one day and leave his wife and children to starve.

A short time after this, a merchant stopped in front of the farmer’s door with two wagons full of goods. He had lost his partner on the way, and he offered the farmer fifty crowns if he would take charge of one of the wagons and go with him to the city.

“I hope you won’t refuse,” the farmer’s wife said to him. “This time you’ll at least earn something.”

Once they set out, the merchant drove the first wagon, and the farmer the second. The weather was bad, and the roads were so rugged that they traveled with great difficulty. Finally, they reached the crossroad, where the merchant asked which way they should take.

“That one over there is the road of the future,” the farmer said. “It’s longer, but it is safer.”

The merchant, however, insisted on taking the road of the present.

“I wouldn’t go that way for a hundred crowns,” the farmer said.

Consequently, they separated. The farmer took the longer road and arrived with his wagon in good condition much earlier than the merchant with his wagon. In fact, the merchant did not rejoin him until nightfall. His wagon had fallen into a hole in the road, where all the merchandise had been damaged, and the merchant had hurt himself as well.

The first inn they reached was run by a host who was old, and a green branch announced that new wine was on sale there for cheap prices. The merchant wanted to stop there and spend the night.

“I wouldn’t do it for a hundred crowns!” the farmer declared, and he departed hurriedly, leaving his companion behind him.

During the evening, a group of young travelers, who had drunk too much of the new wine, quarreled over some little thing. Knives were drawn, and the host, burdened by old age, didn’t have the strength to separate the brawlers. A man was killed, and since they were afraid of the police, they hid the corpse in the merchant’s wagon.

Meanwhile, the merchant, who had slept well and had heard nothing of the fight, rose early to harness his horses. Terrified at finding a dead body in his wagon, he drove off as fast as he could in order to escape a tedious lawsuit. But he didn’t realize that the Austrian police were on his track. They pursued and overtook him. Then they threw the merchant into the prison and confiscated his goods while trying to clear up the matter.

Upon learning of what had happened to his companion, the farmer wanted at least to save the wagon under his charge and returned to his own house. On nearing the garden, he saw a young soldier through the twilight. He was seated on the farmer’s finest plum tree and calmly eating the most recent harvest. The farmer raised his gun to shoot the thief, when he reflected, “I paid a hundred crowns to learn that I must not spend all my rage in one day. Let’s wait till tomorrow. The thief will return.”

So, he made a detour to enter the house by another way. When he knocked at the door, the young soldier flung himself into his arms and cried, “Father, I have a furlough, and I’ve come home to surprise you!”

Later the farmer said to his wife, “Now listen what has happened to me, and see whether I paid too much for my three pieces of advice.”

Then he told her the whole story, and since the poor merchant had been hanged, in spite of all he could do, the farmer found himself the heir of this careless man. As a result, he became rich, and every day since then he has kept repeating that one never pays too much for good advice, and for the first time his wife has agreed with his opinion.

# ■ The Story about the Tailor and His Daughter

Once upon a time there was a tailor, who had a very beautiful daughter of marriageable age. All the young men wanted to wed her because of her beauty. At one point, two rivals went to her and asked for her hand.

"We're here for you," they said.

"What do you want from me?" she replied with a smile.

"We love you," the two young men continued. "We each want to marry you."

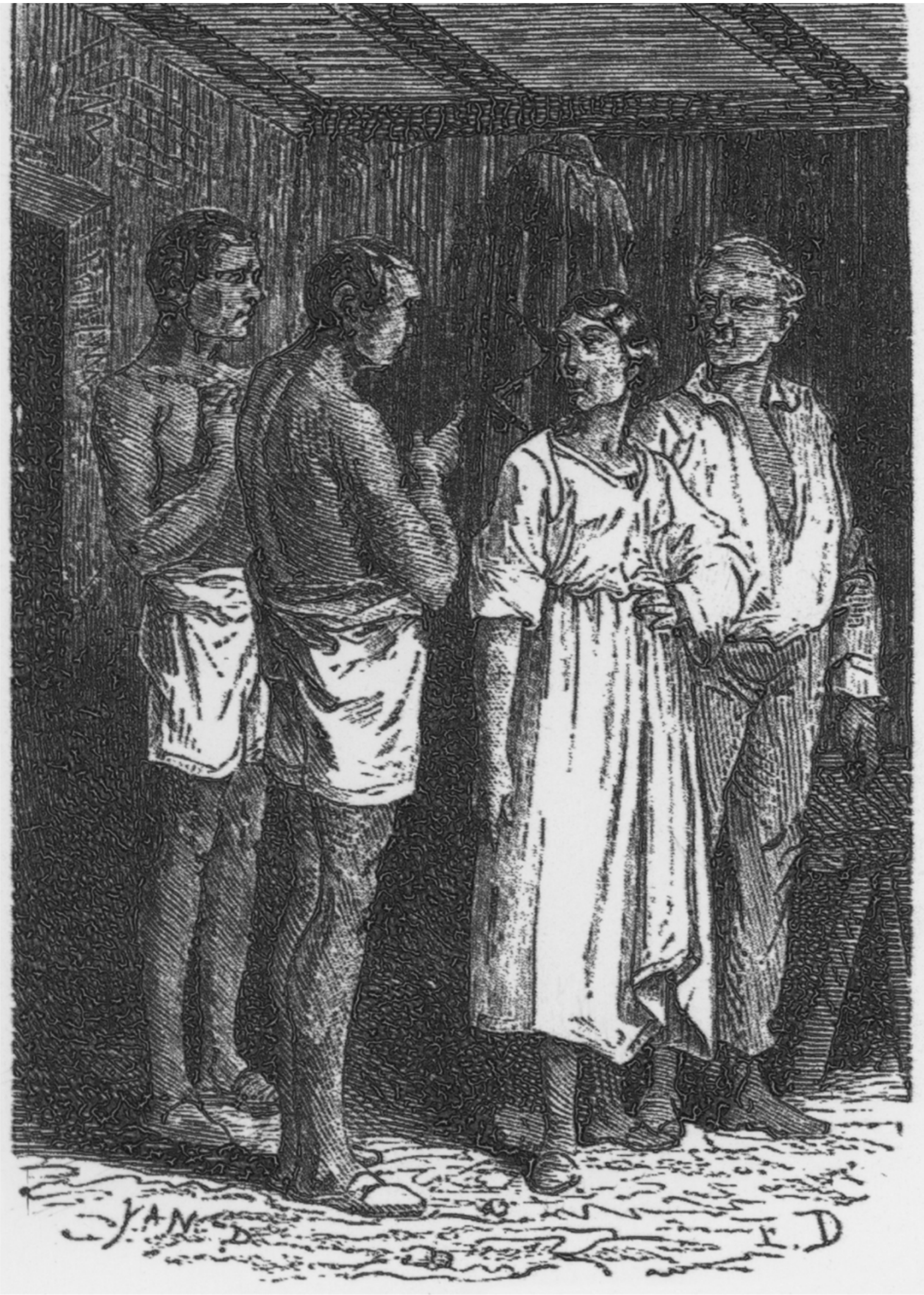
The beautiful maiden had been well-raised. Therefore, she called her father, who heard the two suitors and said to them: "It's late. Go home, and come again tomorrow. I'll tell you then which of you can have my daughter."

At daybreak the next morning, the young men were at his door.

"Here we are!" they cried. "Remember what you promised us yesterday."

"Wait here," said the tailor. "I must go to the market to buy a piece of cloth. When I return, you will hear what I expect of you."

When the tailor returned from the market, he called his daughter, and after she arrived, he said to the young men, "My sons, there are two of you, and I have but one daughter. I cannot give her to both of you and must refuse one of you through a test. So now, you see this piece of cloth. I am going to cut two pieces exactly alike to make two pairs of pants. Each of you will make one pair of pants from the cloth, and the one who finishes first will become my son-in-law."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Both rivals accepted the contest and prepared to set to work under the master's eyes. Then the tailor said to his daughter, "Here is some thread. You can thread the needles for the workmen."

The girl obeyed. She took the spool and sat down next to the young men. But the beautiful maiden was cunning. Her father did not know which young man she loved, and neither did the young men. However, she already knew.

When the tailor went away, the girl threaded the needles, and her suitors took them and set to work. However, she gave short needles to the one she loved, while she gave long needles to his rival. Both sewed and sewed zealously. At eleven o'clock the work was scarcely half done, but at three in the afternoon the young man with the short needles had finished his task, while the other was far from finished.

When the tailor returned, the victor brought him the finished pair of pants. His rival was still sewing.

"My children," the father said, "I didn't wish to show any partiality to either of you. So, this was the reason I divided the cloth into two equal parts and said to you whoever finishes first will become my son-in-law. Did you understand that?"

"Perfectly," they answered. "We understood your words and accepted the test. What's done has been done well!"

Now, the tailor had thought this way: He who finishes his task first will have proved himself to be more skillful, and consequently better suited to support a wife and children. He had not anticipated that his daughter would give the longer needles to the one she did not wish to wed. It's always the clever mind that decides the test. It was the beautiful maiden who chose her husband herself.

# ■ The Eve of St. Mark

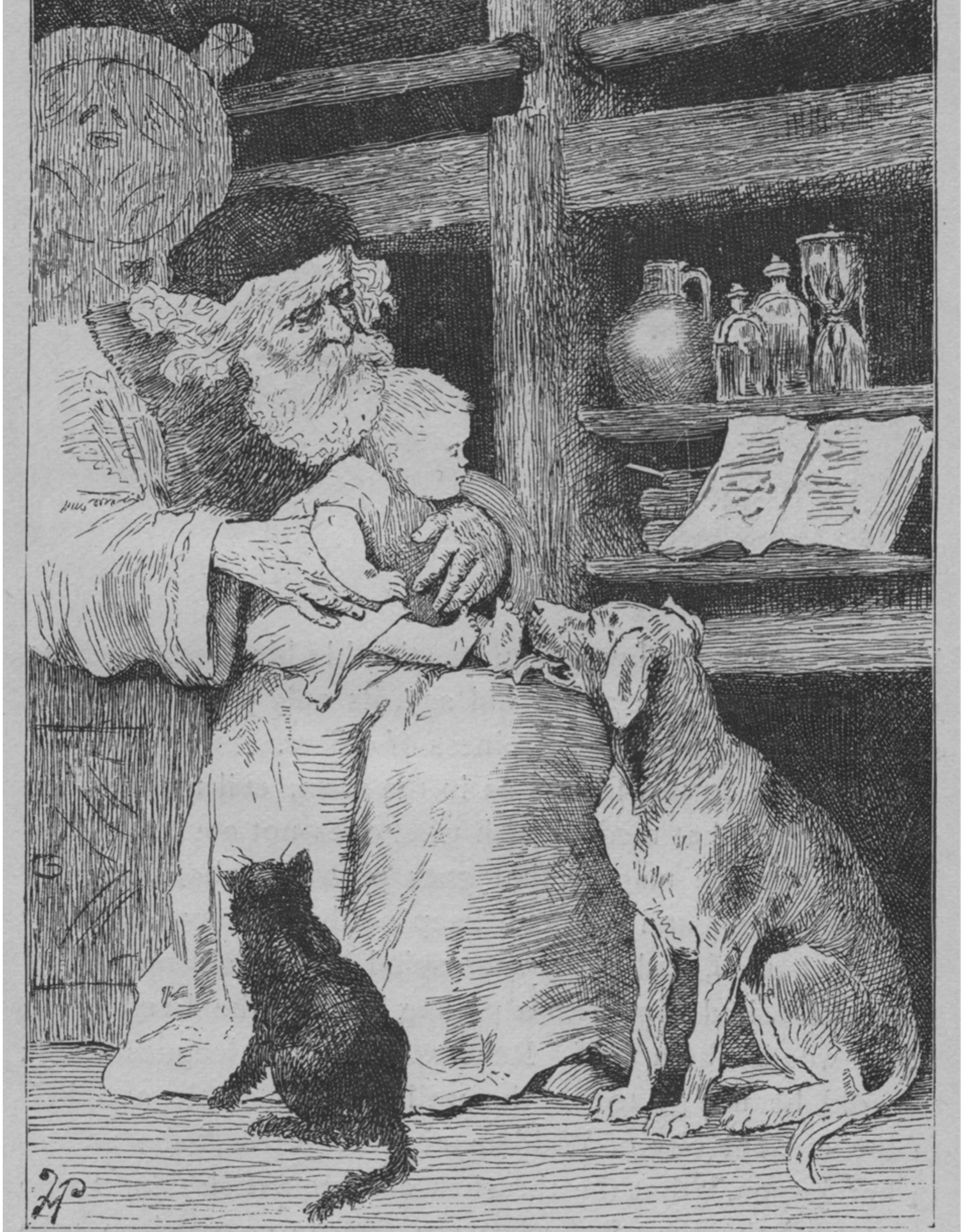
On the shores of the Gulf of Finland, near Revel, in Estonia, there once lived an old sorcerer, who had thoroughly mastered all the secrets of his art. He knew everything, saw everything, understood everything, and could do anything. He could turn dust into gold, or gold into dust, gather the winds, summon or quell the storms, quiet the thunder, or waken the dead from their graves. All this was but child's play to him. He disposed of the earth, sea, and air that did his bidding. It was commonly said that the sun and moon trembled at his sight, fearing that he might send them to shine upon a world even more wicked than ours. The devil himself, with all his pride and cunning, was nothing but a slave when faced with the wand of this terrifying magician.

Yet, in spite of all his knowledge, power, and wealth, this man was not happy. Even though he didn't harm anyone and willingly showed kindness to the poor, he was detested and shunned by everybody. When he entered a village, the women took their children in their arms and fled, and the men shut themselves up in their homes until he went by. The only ones who remained in the streets were those who had some favor to ask. They greeted him with respect and kissed his hand, as if he had been a lord, but no sooner did he turn his back than they cursed him in their hearts, or shook their fists. It is the fate of omnipotent people to go through life unloved and to have their footsteps dogged by envy, hate, and ingratitude.

Our magician had a sad experience in the past. When he was young, he had wanted to marry, but, in spite of his knowledge and power, not one family had been willing to accept him as a suitor. A woman does not like to have her heart and mind read, and all young educated women of good birth know that the first condition for agreeing to marry is that the husband should not be a sorcerer. As a result, our sorcerer lived alone in an old Gothic manor with a large white dog and a black cat for his sole companions. He talked politics with the dog and philosophized with the cat. Let no one be surprised to see a feline philosopher, for it has long since been acknowledged by sages that the finest systems of metaphysics are nothing but pap for cats.

One stormy day, our sorcerer sought to distract himself by walking upon the raging waters. The whistling wind, rumbling thunder, and clashing waves helped him to forget his sad thoughts. All of a sudden, a flash of lightning illuminated a sinking ship, and an infant was lying in a cradle on the deck of this ship. It took the sorcerer only a moment to snatch the innocent victim from death and carry the babe away in his arms.

The old man reached his house well before waves smothered the ship, and he began rocking the child with indescribable tenderness while the little one gazed at his face without fear. It was the first time that any human being had smiled at him. The dog licked the newcomer’s tiny feet and was happy to share in his master’s joy, while the cat fixed his eyes on the stranger with sphinxlike gravity as if about to ask him some riddle and, if need be, to devour him.



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It was in this solitude, far from cities and people, that the orphan grew up among the three friends who had adopted him. Adolf, as the sorcerer named him, was not a common child and benefited well from the lessons he received from his masters. The magician taught him the language of the birds and beasts. The dog showed him how to be gentle, patient, kind, and good. And as to the cat, it was by means of his claws that he scrawled in Adolf's flesh and mind the first principle of all morality, "Do not scratch others, if you don't want to be flayed alive."

For sixteen years Adolf lived happily with his father. He could not take a step in the large forests that surrounded the old manor without meeting friends and comrades. He jumped about with the doe's fawns near their mother. He played a game of hot cockles with the bear cubs and hide-and-seek with the rabbits. The anxious rabbit confided her cares and troubles to him, and the squirrel taught him how to climb the trees and pick the largest nuts. The lark, linnet, and thrush warbled their sweetest songs at his approach. Together they leaped, sang, and made such an uproar that an owl, disturbed in his slumbers, would come with his round eyes and hooked beak and gravely preach that the day was made for sleep, and that silence was wisdom. Imagine how the unruly gang greeted the poor fool, and what a noise they made when he returned to his hole in despair, carrying with him his hooting and sermonizing.

This was the way Adolf passed his days without sorrow or care. When he returned home at night with sparkling eyes and flowing locks, the sorcerer never tired of listening to his stories and admiring him. He would have laid all his learning and treasures at his feet just to spare him one tear. To be loved is the privilege of youth. It is an inestimable blessing, and the young do not appreciate its value. As for elderly people, their only joy is in loving and being happy about the happiness of others.

Unfortunately, in the forests as in the cities, there are always wicked tongues that interfere with things that do not concern them. For instance, take the gossipy magpie, who prowls about, peers into everything, and cannot keep her eyes or her beak to herself. No sooner had she noticed the handsome Adolf than she asked him with a pitying air why he lived alone in the woods like a wolf. The city of Revel was only six miles away. Why didn't he go to see the walls, towers, castle, and bell of the ancient city of Waldemar?

“Certainly,” she added, in her jargon, “the thrushes are flirtatious dames who chatter all the time, but what are they in comparison with the fine city ladies who change their plumage and their tune every day? Then there are the men at the tavern at night, with their music, gaiety, laughter, noise, and fun. Whoever hasn’t seen all this has seen nothing. People only vegetate in the woods. They experience real life in the city.”

Upon saying this, the magpie shook her tail, cocked her head, and called on a sparrow named Friquet to back her words. He had come from Revel that morning to munch cherries. Friquet, a true city bird, a bold glutton and impudent gossip, screeched in his shrillest tones that it was the most shameful thing in the world for anyone but a beast to live in the woods.

“Three cheers for the city,” he cried, “where men drink when they are not thirsty, eat when they are not hungry, and amuse themselves by doing nothing. They turn day into night, and winter into summer. Pleasure and liberty reign there. When one is young, handsome, and rich, it is foolish, stupid, and criminal to bury one’s self in the country fields.”

“Unless,” the magpie added, “there are those who selfishly keep you at home, knowing that in the city they would have to share their treasure with charming men and gracious women. Farewell, my dear Adolf, you are a good boy, and your papa ought to be very much pleased with you. Come, Friquet, there are some beautiful people from high society expecting us in the city. We must not let them get bored by waiting. How could they dine without us?”

The foolish words of these bird-brained gossips caused poor Adolf to become strangely confused. His friends, the birds, sang their merriest songs to him in vain, and the rabbit tried without success to amuse him with his tricks and antics. The forest seemed to him a desert. At the bend of each path he took, he looked for a human figure. He felt the need for mixing with humans like himself, whom he had never seen except in books and pictures. Weary with this vain desire, he returned home somewhat dejected and with his head hanging. For the first time in his life, he felt unhappy. No sooner did he take a seat than Caesar, the dog, looked at him with anxious eyes.

“Adolf,” he said, “did something happen to you?”

The child petted the dog and did not answer. Mustache, the cat, who was asleep under the stove, half-opened one eye and pricked up his ears.

“Adolf,” he asked, “did something happen to you?”

Adolf sighed and did not answer. The sorcerer, who had been listening, took from his belt a little mirror in which he could read people’s thoughts. Scarcely had he cast his eyes on it when he turned pale.

“Adolf,” he murmured in a trembling voice, “you wish to leave us.”

“Leave you, Father!” Adolf exclaimed. “Me? Never! I am so happy with you.”

And he burst into tears.

“My child,” the sorcerer said, “I can see your soul better than you can yourself. You are bored of staying here with us. You wish to go to the city and live with people. I had dreamed of a sweeter fate for you. I have wished to keep you with me and to spare you the bitterness and disappointments of life. But one cannot escape his destiny. Go where your heart calls you. Tomorrow you will depart for the city.”

“With you, Father?”

“No, my son. At my age and with my experience, only solitude is endurable. But you will not go alone; I will give you companions who will watch over you.”

Adolf wept and threw himself into his father’s arms. He vowed he would never leave him. The sorcerer embraced him and smiled sadly. An hour later, Adolf was asleep and dreaming sweetly while the old man sat at the foot of the bed and gazed at the child through his tears.

## II

At sunrise Adolf was ready to depart. Three black horses stood in waiting at the castle gate. The most handsome and most spirited was for him. The others were held by two imposing-looking squires. One was dressed in white with a cocked hat on his head. He was none other than honest Caesar, turned into a valet, while the other, in black with a knife thrust in his belt, was easily recognizable by his grimace as Mustache, with his green eyes and thick, bristling coat.

There is nothing as sad as parting. After they set out, the three friends rode a long way in silence. But gradually, the sun rose, and the day began. Their tongues were loosened, and they chattered as merrily as birds. Caesar admired all Adolf’s zany remarks, for he loved him; Mustache grumbled unceasingly and admired nothing in the world but himself, for he was a philosopher. Laughing and arguing, they passed through the forest and came to the bend of the road where it turned into a plain. All of a sudden, Adolf cried out to his companions and pointed to a strange figure that caused him to shudder. There was an old woman in rags by the side of the road. She was leaning with both hands on a crutch and shaking all over. Her uncombed gray locks fell disheveled about her wrinkled, yellow face. Her dim eyes were almost hidden beneath her inflamed eyelids. Her hooked nose and sharp, turned-up chin nearly met like the beaks of two fighting cocks, and her mouth was pushed back so that one could see her bloody gums as she stammered and made confusing sounds.

“What is this?” Adolf asked.

“A gypsy, a beggar, a thief,” Mustache responded.

“A poor woman overwhelmed by old age,” Caesar said.

“What is old age?” Adolf asked, for he had never seen anything like this in the forest.

“Old age,” answered the perceptive Mustache, “is the winter of life. When snow falls, trees lose their leaves. When hair turns white, people lose their teeth, eyes, stomach, and legs. It is the law of nature.”

“And I shall soon be like this poor creature,” Adolf sighed.

“No, my son,” Caesar responded, “it takes seventy or eighty years to make an old man of a child, and you are only sixteen.”

“Seventy years pass quickly,” Mustache stated. “As the great poet Pindar has said, ‘Life is the dream of a shadow.’ An admirable saying for a person who was neither a cat nor a philosopher from profession.”

Caesar advised Adolf to throw some money to the old woman, and after he did this, he spurred on his horse to escape this sad image. Anyway, they all rode fast because they were getting hungry like mere mortals, and they saw smoke in the distance coming from chimneys in a village.

“At last,” Adolf thought, “I shall see people.”

The first house they encountered appeared to be a decent-looking inn with a golden lion for a sign. They called, but no one answered. Since the door stood halfway open, they entered the public room and knocked on the table with their whips. Suddenly, they heard a groan in an adjoining chamber. Adolf ran to see what was happening and found himself face to face with a new kind of misery.

A young woman with two children in her arms lay on a mattress thrown on the floor. One child was shaking with chills, and the other was burning red with fever. The frantic mother could only stammer a few words with her parched lips.

“Pardon me, good sirs,” she said. “Spring has come, and with it the fever. This is the day of the chills, and I am not able to wait on you.”

“Isn’t there another inn in the village?” Mustache asked.

“Yes, but don’t go there, good sir. Smallpox is raging in it just now. The best thing for you to do is to hurry on to Revel as soon as possible because our village is full of the epidemic. Excuse me, and may God be with you!”

“Is there anything I can do for you?” Adolf asked.

“Thank you, my lord,” she replied. “Time is the only remedy for the sickness sent to us by heaven. We must be resigned.”

Once they left this gloomy room, Adolf turned to Mustache.

“What is sickness?” he asked. “I never saw anything of the kind among our companions in the forest.”

“Indeed,” the green-eyed philosopher stated, “sickness is the monopoly of humans. They alone have fevers and doctors.”

“Are people often ill?” Adolf asked.

“That depends upon temperaments,” Mustache responded. “Women are ill all their lives, or think that they are, which amounts to the same thing. As to men, the healthiest suffer little except during childhood, old age, and a part of their mature life.”

“It’s awful!” Adolf cried.

“Bah!” replied the philosopher. “It’s the law of human nature. As that sick woman in the inn told us judiciously, we must be resigned.”

“Poor creatures!” Adolf thought. “Menaced by sickness and old age, people must cling together, and help and love each other!”

“Look over there, master!” Caesar exclaimed.

Adolf raised his eyes and saw a crowd of peasants seated around tables set along the road. Each one held a glass or bottle in his hand. Some were singing and others shouting. One man was dancing on the table amid the clattering glasses, while his companions kept time with him by drumming on the wood with their knives.

“What is that?” asked Adolf.

“A village festival,” Caesar answered.

“Happy men!” Mustache sniggered. “Drunk and crazy!”

“At last,” said Adolf, “we have found people who enjoy life.”

As he was speaking, some soldiers marched along the highway and were hailed by the drinkers. One of them answered with an insult, and a bottle was consequently flung at his head. He stooped in time to avoid the blow and picked up a huge stone, which he hurled among the crowd. A sharp cry was heard. The stone had struck a woman full in the face, and blood trickled down her cheeks. Once they caught sight of this, all the drunken men began to attack the soldiers, arming themselves with bottles, jugs, benches, and sticks. The soldiers drew their swords in self-defense, and there was a horrendous battle, which did not last long.

Before Adolf could reach the spot where the fight was taking place, two of the soldiers had managed to save themselves and were followed by volleys of stones as they fled toward the city, loudly calling for help, and leaving their comrades on the ground, lifeless in the mud or writhing in agony. They were avenged, however, for side by side with them lay three dead and several dying peasants, while others were carried off by their comrades, who tried to heal their wounds and escape before the soldiers returned. The men were furious and gloomy; the women were shrieking, and the children, crying. It was a distressing spectacle.

Adolf kneeled down beside a peasant who had been ripped open by a saber and now slept in eternal slumber. The boy tried to understand the meaning of the man’s closed eyes and speechless lips.

“What is this?” he asked Caesar.

“Alas, master,” came the answer, “it is death. This man’s sufferings are over. He’ll never wake again.”

“Yes,” Mustache said, “life is a dream that begins and ends in nothingness. Dust before birth, and dust after death. Such is the destiny of humans.”

“What!” Adolf exclaimed. “Is life so easily lost? Don’t humans have more respect for this precious gift that we all have?”

“Bah!” said Mustache. “Their greatest pleasure is to kill each other. People only remember the conquerors who slay them. Glory is bloodshed.”

“My friends,” the young man said, “let us return to my father. I don’t want to go to Revel. I’ve seen too much of humans. My heart is broken.

Take me back to our forests so that I can forget the terrible lesson I learned today."

## III

On hearing these words, Mustache smiled grimly to himself and hastily turned back toward the manor. Caesar tried to console Adolf, but the young man hung his head and didn't listen to him. He was upset with grief, and his heart was overflowing with bitterness. He was tired of people, even though solitude scared him. On the word of two chattering birds, he had pictured a world full of enchantment to himself. He had anticipated a beautiful dream, and at sixteen it is not easy to renounce these sweet illusions.

While Caesar and Mustache raced to see who would be the first to tell the sorcerer about his child's return, Adolf entered the forest and pensively followed the path that he had taken so cheerfully in the morning. Night was approaching, and the shadows deepened his sadness even more.

"What's the matter, Adolf?" a gentle voice whispered. "Has anything happened to you?"

The young boy raised his head and saw a nightingale perched upon a small branch.

"Good evening, dear bird," he said. "Why aren't you singing as usual? Is your heart crushed like mine? Perhaps you, too, have seen humans?"

"No," the nightingale answered, "I'm not singing tonight because I'm saving myself for a great occasion. This is St. Mark's eve, and I'm keeping my voice fresh to serenade the one I love."

"Alas!" Adolf said. "Whoever it is you love cannot escape sickness, old age, or death."

"What are you talking about?" the nightingale responded. "The fairies of the night are immortal. Their youth and beauty never wither."

"Are they good?" the boy asked.

"They are goodness itself," the nightingale responded. "Their hearts are full of pity for all who suffer here below."

"I'd like to see them!" Adolf cried.

“My handsome friend,” the nightingale responded, “they can be seen only once a year on the eve of St. Mark. To reach the place where they stay without danger, you must have wings.”

“Oh, nightingale, dear nightingale,” the boy pleaded, “take me with you! Show me the way to them. Don’t refuse me, if you love me.”

“My child,” the nightingale responded, “I fear I have talked too much. We birds have more feathers than brains. Forget my gossiping, and forgive me.”

But Adolf insisted with such fervor and with so many pleas and tears that the nightingale shook his head and said, “My child, my child, you should fear knowing too much. Many things are hidden from people’s eyes for their happiness. If you ever manage to see the fairies, you’ll have to say farewell to your peace of mind. The world that charms you will be nothing but a desert, and you’ll spend your life regretting a vanished dream.”

“No, no, dear bird!” the boy cried. “Forget this misplaced pity. If I don’t see the fairies this night, there’s nothing left for me but to die. Grant my request, and save my life.”

“If that’s the case,” the nightingale said, “I’ll tell you what to do, but the danger is great, and it’s doubtful you’ll succeed. You must know, then, that every year on the eve of St. Mark, at midnight, the King of the Serpents holds high court in the great marsh where the water lilies grow. It’s at this time and place that the king is served a golden cup filled with the milk given by the goats of the sky. If you can grab the cup and drink some of this magic milk, your eyes will be opened, and you’ll see everything that the night hides with its black cloak from the eyes of mortals. But remember that all the serpents in the world will be at this meeting, and that just one of their bites will kill you.”

“They cannot be worse than people,” Adolf declared, “and, besides, what do I have to fear from death? I’ve lost all taste for life.”

And with these words he leaped from his horse, threw the reins on its neck, and plunged into the dense forest.

## IV

After a long walk, Adolf reached the great water lily marsh and found nothing there but silence and darkness. Although it was spring, he thought he saw by the light of the stars that the grass had just been cut. Piles of recently mown hay were lying here and there as if it were harvest time. Otherwise, nothing had changed. Nothing was stirring. Therefore, Adolf began to think that the nightingale had played a trick on him. Then, a distant clock slowly struck midnight. All at once, a strange light appeared in the middle of the marsh like a star that had fallen from heaven. Adolf approached this apparition just as the turf around him seemed to be crawling with ants around an anthill. Actually, what he had taken for heaps of grass were thousands of serpents asleep on the ground that had awakened at the summons of their lord and were hurrying to pay him homage. There's no need to say how surprised the reckless boy was, but it was too late to draw back. All that he could do was to keep in the shadows and follow this multitude by crawling silently after them.

It was not long before he saw an enormous dragon wearing a crown of emeralds and rubies on its head. The glistening light of the jewels illuminated the forest far away. It was His Majesty, the King of the Serpents. Around him, like courtiers vying with each other for the smile of their prince, there were adders, asps, vipers, and serpents of all sizes and colors, entangled together, all stretching up their swollen necks and darting out their forked tongues, hissing loudly. The noise was deafening, and the sight one that might have frozen with terror the boldest heart.

I would not dare to say that our hero was fearless, but I can say that, at the sight of the golden cup, he forgot his fear. Without thinking of danger, he threw himself like a madman into this crowd of serpents, more numerous and squeezed together than the blades of grain in a wheat field. Then, suddenly, he rushed to the cup, grabbed it, drank the milk in one gulp, and flung the cup far from him. Finally, feeling escape impossible, he folded his arms and waited for his death.

To his great joy, however, the dragon rushed to the cup and carried it away. Then the army of serpents followed their chief with terrifying hisses. Adolf found himself alone in the forest, where everything turned again into silence. His heart had not yet stopped palpitating, when he heard the first notes of the nightingale. The bird had not deceived him. The fairies were approaching.

The moon rose and illuminated the forest with its silver light. Adolf looked around him. The marsh had been transformed into a glade carpeted with moss. The trees were covered with leaves, and violets were blossoming everywhere as if in springtime. In the distance, Adolf caught glimpses of bright figures flitting through the forest like sylphs floating over the turf. It was clear that they were the fairies of the night.

Adolf hid himself behind an old oak tree so he wouldn't scare them. How beautiful they were in their white drapery, their hair carelessly knotted behind, and their arms and feet bare, as they skimmed over the moss without touching it! On reaching the place of the rendezvous, each one was questioned by her companions. Adolf listened with delight to the soft whispering of their voices, sweeter than the bubbling of the forest brooks.

"Where have you been, sister, where have you been?"

"I've come from the red house, where old Bridget had fallen asleep, exhausted by her work. She forgot that she'd have no bread for tomorrow if she didn't finish spinning. So, I sat on her lap, took her distaff in my hand, turned her wheel, and spun thread enough for a whole week."

"Where have you been, sister, where have you been?"

"I've come from a little cabin by the seashore, where a poor woman has been waiting a year for her husband to come home from sea. Yesterday I saw his ship off the coast, and I showed him to her in a dream, smiling, and saying, 'Patience, dear love, in three days I will be in your arms.' "

"Where have you been, sister, where have you been?"

"I've come from the shop of Harold, the moneylender. For three nights I scratched on the wall like a mouse and cried in his ear, 'Take care of your treasure, the robbers are here!' There's no sleep for those who show no pity to the poor."

"Where have you been, sister, where have you been?"

"I've come from the cottage of Wilhelm, the gamekeeper. The poor man lost his wife nine months ago, and when he makes his rounds at night, there is no one in his house except the baby. Well, I found the infant crying and about to fall from her bed. So, I took her in my arms and sang a lullaby. Then she smiled at me as if I had been her mother and fell asleep."

"Where have you been, sister, where have you been?"

“I’ve come from the house of the rich Gustaf without a heart, who has no mercy on his tenants. I found him snoring in an armchair, drunk with wine and surrounded by his money. I lit all the candles to start a fire, and the frightened man tumbled on the floor crying ‘Fire!’ I let his castle burn to the ground to teach him that the great have need of the small here below.”

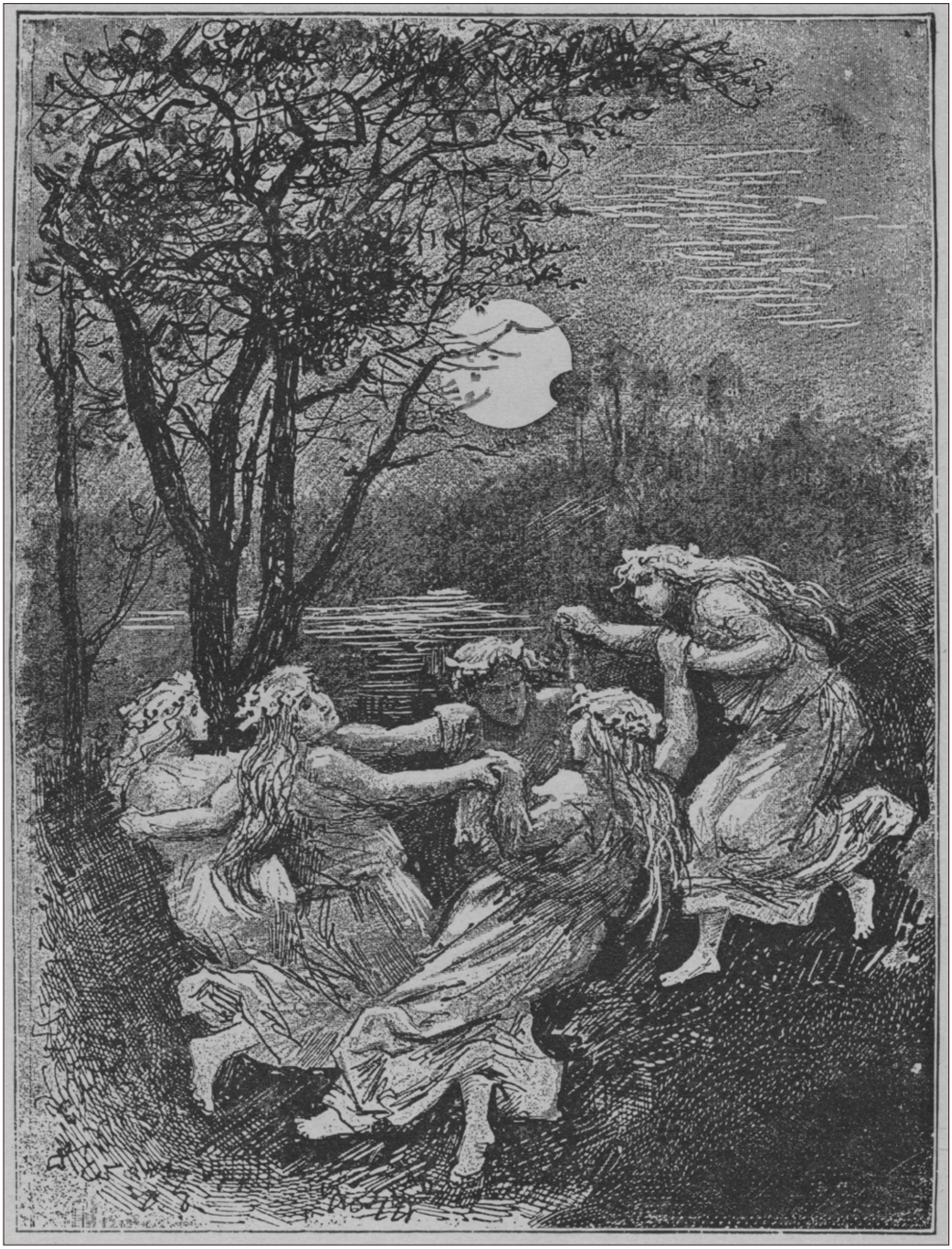
“Where have you been, sister, where have you been?”

“I’ve come from the green cottage, where Matilda is mourning the loss of her child. I gave her infant back to her in a dream, and she’ll hold him in her arms until daybreak. When she awakes, she will doubtless weep, but she will know that her child is still living in the invisible world, and hope will return to her.”

At this moment, the nightingale greeted the moon at the zenith with its sweetest song. The fairies joined hands in a circle, and danced around, singing, in low tones,

When the day expires,
All who breathe
And all who sigh
Are under our reign.
The world belongs to us.
Mortals, poor friends,
Forget your pain.
Sleep, all of you, sleep.
We shall watch over you.

Silence blankets this vast land
While we now dance, hand in hand,
Singing sweet songs with soft refrains.
Mortals, poor friends,



Forget your pain.

Sleep, all of you, sleep,
We shall watch over you.

Once the round was finished, the fairies separated into different groups. Some seated themselves on the grass and gathered the violets, primroses, and white strawberry blossoms that grew around them. The others danced in couples to the music and songs of their companions:

We are the voices
Of the wind of the woods.
We are the sweet breath
That spreads the scent
From the flowers' perfume
Far over the fields.

We are the lightning
That splits the air
And marks the blue sky.
We are the lightning
That ignites the marsh fire
That makes the shepherd tremble.

We are the star beams
That guide the sails
On bitter salt waves.
Our bright lights
Sparkle like
A burning fire
In the shadows of the sea.

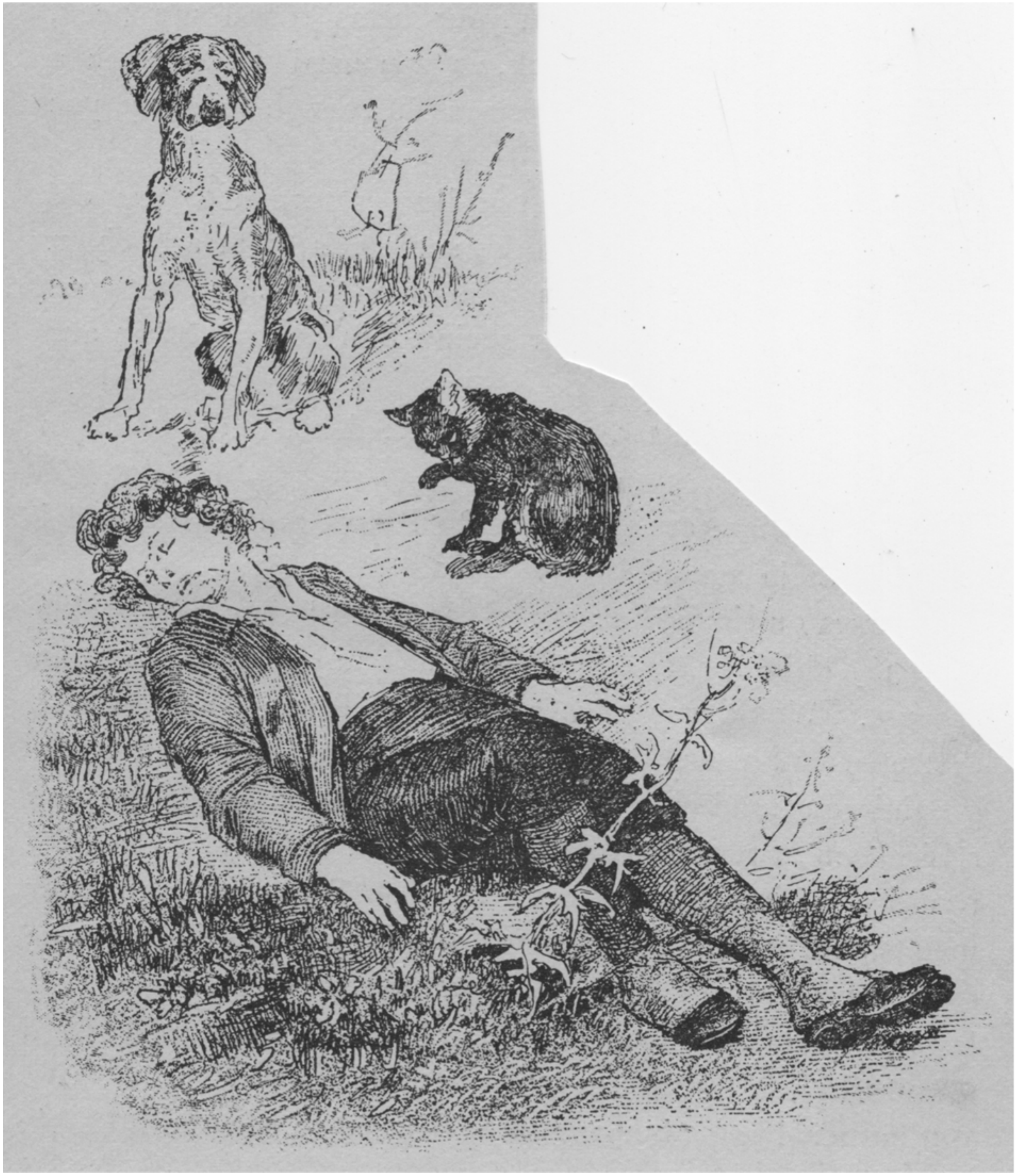
We are the bell tones
Sounding complaints.
We are the noise
Of the tide on the shore.
We are the dreams
Born of the night.

We are the murmurs eternally heard.
The voice of nature,
The smile of the skies.
We are the enchanters that chase
Sadness and gloom far away
From a world too weary and old.

Intoxicated by these magic songs and dances, Adolf threw caution to the winds and left his retreat. As he approached the fairies, one of them, the most graceful of all, passed so near that she touched him with her dress. Adolf frantically grabbed her hand. The fairy turned around sharply, but on seeing the trembling boy, she just smiled sadly.

“Poor child,” she whispered, “but this is what you wanted.”

Leaving her hand in Adolf’s, she looked at him and burst into tears. Then she kissed his forehead, and he felt a chill run through his veins and fainted.



## V

When he regained consciousness, the sun had already been shining for some time. He looked around him with astonishment. Caesar was on his left, trying to warm him with his breath. Mustache sat on his right, washing his own face.

“Foolish boy!” Caesar cried. “Why did you stay so late on the marsh? The cold night has given you a good chill. If you knew how anxious your father is about you!”

“Caesar, my good Caesar,” Adolf exclaimed, “where are the fairies? I must see them again.”

“He is raving,” the grave Mustache remarked. “Just as I predicted. We need the effort of nature to bring back his fervor and increase his vital force.”

“Mustache,” Adolf cried, “where are the fairies? I’ve seen them! I must see them again!”

“What fairies?”

“The fairies of the night. The invisible fairies.”

“How can you see what is invisible?” the cat responded. “The idea is unphilosophical.”

“Caesar, my friend,” Adolf continued, “let us return to my father. Only he can understand my trouble.”

“I’ll run and tell my master to send some means of bringing you to your senses!” Mustache exclaimed. “Judging by your pale face, my poor boy, you are not able to take one step after the other. If you had been wiser and had listened to my lessons in philosophy, you would never have run into the forest chasing a will-o’-the-wisp. You would have—”

“Adolf,” Caesar interrupted, “put your arms round my neck, and try to climb on my back, as you used to do when a child. Perhaps I’ll have strength enough to carry you home.”

This was how Adolf returned to the old manor and was deposited in the sorcerer’s large armchair. His father felt very much like scolding him, but when he saw him so haggard and trembling, the sorcerer became deeply anxious.

“What’s the matter, my son?” he cried and embraced him. “Father, where are the fairies? I’ve seen them, and I must see them again.”

“Damn them!” the sorcerer cried. “They’ve stolen my child! My dear Adolf, ask anything my art can produce. Would you like to have gold? I’ll make you so rich that men will grovel on their knees before you and kiss the ground you tread on. If you’re ambitious, I’ll give you a kingdom, twenty of them, if you like. You’ll be surrounded with smiling faces. Men will applaud all your whims, and women will crowd around you to win a glance from your eyes. The world is my domain. It can be yours. I’ll lay it at your feet; but my power does not extend beyond this world. Don’t ask me for what belongs to the heavens.”

“Father, I want only one thing and that’s to see the invisible fairies again.”

“Alas!” the sorcerer cried. “What use is all my power and knowledge? The heart of a child has desires that this world will not satisfy.”

“Father!” the boy cried. “I see them! I hear them! Listen to the heavenly melodies.” And then he murmured in a faint voice:

Then mortals, poor children,
Wake not nor weep.
All of you, sleep;
We will watch over you,
Watch we will keep!

“Adolf, my child, be yourself again!” the old man exclaimed and pressed his son to his heart.

“Look, Father, she’s there! Do you see her? She’s smiling at me. She’s calling me! This time, she herself is stretching out her hand to me. ‘Poor child!’ she says. ‘But this is what you wanted.’ Yes, I did indeed. Oh, fairies, my sisters, I cannot live without you. Wait for me; I am coming, I am coming!”

A smile flitted over his pale face. He stretched out his arms and tried to stand up. Then his head fell back in the chair, and it was all over.

## VI

The old manor has been in ruins for a long time. The ivy has invaded everything, even to the dilapidated roof, and a large oak tree has pushed its branches through the front steps. For more than a century, this gloomy dwelling has been inhabited only by flocks of ravens and every now and then by a solitary eagle. The peasants never willingly pass its abandoned walls at night. It is said that groans are heard to emanate from the turrets at night, and more than one traveler swears that he has seen fiery eyes blaze there through the darkness. The sorcerer has not been forgotten, and in the evening, when the doors are closed, people still talk about the fairies and Adolf, who died from seeing them. Whether this is true history or legend, it’s difficult to know. The sages of our day believe only in what they can see or touch. For my part, not being a sage, all that a long life has taught me is that there is nothing true in this world but what we do not see. God grant that, like Adolf, I may someday see the invisible, even if it were only for a moment to forget what I cannot avoid seeing here on earth.

# ■ Fragolette

Once upon a time there was an orphan, a young maiden, who lived in the vicinity of Mantua. She went to school every morning with her books and basket. The school was not far away, but it took a long time to get there because she had to walk along a steep path, bordered by lush bushes and large trees, full of blossoms, fruit, birds, and butterflies, depending on the season. How was it possible then not to stop and gaze at all these miraculous creations?

One day our schoolgirl noticed a blue butterfly in the heart of a wild rose. It was the most beautiful butterfly she had ever seen. When she approached it on tiptoe, she carefully raised her hand and held her breath, but the butterfly slipped through her fingers, fluttered to the right and left in a carefree manner, and settled a little higher up the slope of the embankment. The girl followed, but it flew away, stopped at a flower briefly, and then flitted from place to place, until it led her up the road near a large walled enclosure, which had a bad reputation in that region. It was said that this was the place where the fairies danced in a circle on beautiful spring evenings and witches held their Sabbaths on somber winter nights. Although the walls had crumbled in many places and the debris had filled up the holes, not a single good Christian dared venture into this accursed place. However, butterflies do not have any scruples, and children are like butterflies.

Our blue-winged traveler unceremoniously entered this garden, which resembled a virgin forest, and the girl followed it, moved by the pleasure of the pursuit. But she had hardly made her way through some bushes when she abruptly stopped and cried out with delight. Before her was a meadow, surrounded by large trees with red and black spots that dotted the field. They were actually wild strawberries that did not have an owner and offered themselves to anyone who wanted to benefit from this lost treasure.

Forgetting the butterfly, our schoolgirl kneeled down in the grass, and in less than a quarter of an hour, she filled her basket. Then she took off and arrived at the school, breathless and redder than the strawberries she had gathered. She was scolded for coming so late, but she was so proud and happy that she didn’t hear a word that the teacher said to her. What is the use of preaching rules to conquerors?

At lunchtime she shared her treasure with her little friends, who could not help but admire her courage and good luck. She looked like a queen surrounded by a group of courtiers. Nothing was missing in her triumph, and from then on, friends decided to call her Fragolette, which in French means Little Strawberry, and she kept this nickname her entire life. At least, this is the only name that history has passed on to us.

To tell the truth, there were some timid souls who could not refrain from acting with certain scruples. While eating the strawberries, they asked whether it might not be like tempting the devil by robbing him on his own ground, but these comments were lost in the shouts of victory; and no one listened to them.

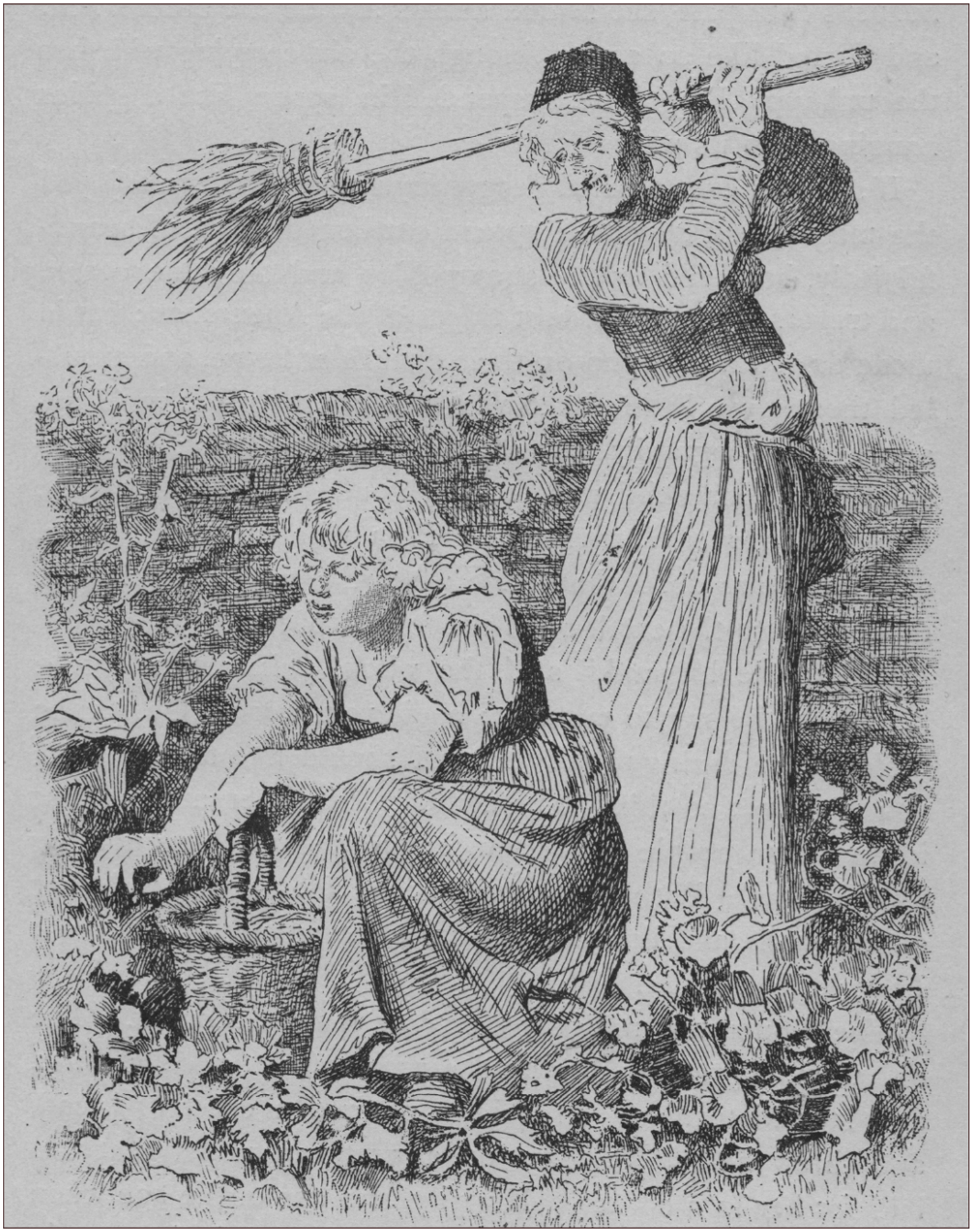
As the end of our story will show, however, it might have been better to listen to them. Thrilled by her good fortune and popularity, Fragolette returned again and again to the accursed place and finally began to look upon it as her own.

“The meadow is abandoned,” she said. “Blackbirds and thrushes devour the fruit. Surely a Christian has just as much right to it as the birds.”

One day, however, while she was gathering her usual harvest, a terrible blow on the head knocked her to the ground.

“I have caught you, you thief!” a terrifying voice cried. “You shall pay for this!”

Stunned by the blow, Fragolette tried to stand up, and when she did, she saw before her a figure that caused her to freeze with horror. It was an old woman, tall, gaunt, and wrinkled, with red eyes and a nose like the beak of a vulture. Two teeth longer and sharper than a wild boar’s tusks protruded from her bloody mouth. Fragolette tried to stammer an apology, but the old woman, who was a witch, and an ogress to boot, did not deign to hear a word. She tied Fragolette’s hands behind her, wound a rope seven times round her waist, and made a running knot in it. Then she passed through it the handle of the enormous broom that she had used to knock down the girl. Muttering in the devil’s language some of those horrible words that make the heavens turn pale and the earth tremble, she sat down on the broomstick and shot into the air like an arrow, carrying with her the unfortunate Fragolette, dangling like a spider from its web.



If someone had ever taught her geography, Fragolette might have enjoyed the view of the magnificent spectacle below her. It was beautiful

Italy, bordered by the snowcapped Alps and the blue ocean, and crossed by the verdant ridges of the Apennines. But in those days women spun on their distaffs at home and did not concern themselves much about what was happening in China or Peru. They had very little need of geography. Moreover, the poor girl was too frightened to open her eyes. She passed over Mount Vesuvius and Mount Etna without viewing them and was more dead than alive when the magic broomstick descended to the earth amid the forests of Sicily.

"Get up, you little thief!" said the witch, pulling her by the hair. "You belong to me, and now your work will begin! Go and set the table in the dining room. How I'd like to eat you if you weren't so thin!" she added, feeling the girl's arms. "Nevertheless, in my house people soon grow fat, and I won't lose anything by waiting."

After making this horrible jest, she opened her large mouth and licked her lips with a smile that gave poor Fragolette goose-bumps. As one might think, the dinner was not very cheerful. The old woman hungrily devoured roast cat, mice in jelly, and stewed turnips. Fragolette gnawed a crust of bread and burst into tears on a straw mattress laid down for her in a corner. Fortunately, she was of the age when sleep is stronger than sorrow, and she had scarcely touched the ground when she fell asleep.

## II

The day after this sad adventure, Fragolette's slavery began. Every morning she was obliged to sweep and dust the whole house, cook the meals, serve at the table, wash the dishes, and, what was the worst, help to dress her hideous mistress. She exhausted herself for hours curling the only three hairs that the ogress had on her head. After that, she had to clean her two large teeth, and put rice powder, rouge, and plaster patches on her face. When all this painting was done, she was just happy to be let off after three or four slaps across the face.

Nevertheless, in spite of this hard life, Fragolette grew taller and prettier every day. I wouldn't say that she grew better, for she was not one of those good creatures who kiss the hand that strikes them. No, indeed, her blood boiled in her veins, and she dreamed only of rage and vengeance. The old woman realized this. People always fear those whom they harm. Often, while Fragolette was curling her hair, the old woman wondered whether her servant might not seize the opportunity to strangle her, and whether it would not be wise to warn the girl against doing this and thus prevent her.

One day, when the hag found Fragolette more beautiful than usual, her heart was consumed by anger and jealousy.

“Take this basket,” she said to the young girl, “and go to the fountain. Bring it back full of water; and if you don’t, I’ll eat you up.”

The innocent girl ran at full speed, thinking that the basket was enchanted, and that the witch as usual was amusing herself by frightening her. She dipped the basket into the fountain, but, on lifting it, the water all seeped out as if from a sieve. She tried to fill it three times, and three times her labor was in vain. At last she understood that the ogress intended to kill her. Furious and desperate, she leaned against the fountain and began weeping. Suddenly she heard a sweet voice calling her: “Fragolette, Fragolette, why are you weeping?”

She lifted her head and saw a handsome young man looking at her tenderly.

“Who are you,” she asked, “and how do you know my name?”

“I am the witch’s son, and my name is Belebon. I know that she wants to kill you no matter what, but she won’t succeed. I promise you. Give me a kiss, and I’ll fill your basket.”

“Kiss the son of the witch! Never!” Fragolette responded proudly.

“Well, I’ll be less hard-hearted than you,” the young man answered. And, breathing three times on the basket, he dipped it into the fountain and pulled it out full of water. Not a drop escaped.

Fragolette returned to the house and set the basket on the table without saying a word. The ogress turned as pale as a ghost.

“Are you, by chance, of my kind?” she asked, staring straight into the eyes of the young girl. Then, she slapped her face and said, “You have seen Belebon, and he’s helped you. Admit it!”

“You should know, since you’re a witch.”

For each answer, the hag slapped her across the face so hard that Fragolette had to cling to the table to keep from falling.

“Good! Very good!” cried the witch. “We shall see who will win the day! Indeed, whoever laughs last, laughs best!”

The next day the ogress said to Fragolette, “I’m going to take a trip to Africa. I’ll return this evening. You see this sack of wheat. Well, it must all be baked into bread before I return. It’s no harder than carrying water in a basket. Beware if you don’t succeed!”

After saying this, she sniggered, left the room, and locked the door behind her.

“This time I’m done for!” the young girl cried. “How can I grind the grain and knead and bake the bread? I don’t have a grindstone or oven, or any time to do it.”

She beat the door with her hands again and again, hoping to break it open and flee, but it was Belebon who opened it.

“Fragolette, Fragolette,” he said. “I only wish to do something good for you. Give me a kiss, and I’ll take charge of baking the bread, and you’ll be saved.”

“Kiss the son of the witch!” Fragolette answered trembling. “Never!”

“You are pitiless, Fragolette, but I won’t let you die.”

He whistled, and, all of a sudden, rats and mice came running from all the holes in the house. The rats carried the wheat to the mill and returned quickly with a sack of flour. Then they heated the oven while the mice made the bread. By the time the witch returned, everything was baked, and the golden loaves were piled to the ceiling.

“You miserable creature!” the old woman exclaimed. “You’ve seen Belebon, and he’s helped you. Admit it!”

“You must know, since you’re a witch.”

Enraged, the ogress went to slap her face, but Fragolette ducked, and the old woman fell forward and struck her nose on the table. She turned blue with rage and pain and cried out: “Good! Very good! We shall see who’ll win the day! Whoever laughs last, laughs best!”

## III

Two days later, the hag put on her best smiling face and called Fragolette.

“My child,” she said, “I want you to go to my sister’s house, ask her for her casket, and bring it to me.”

“How am I to go when I don’t know where your sister lives, or what she is called?”

“Nothing is easier,” the witch answered. “Go straight ahead until you come to a mountain stream that crosses the road. Then ford it, and a little farther on you’ll see an old castle with an iron gate, where my sister, Viperine, lives. Go, and hurry back, my child.”

“What a miracle!” Fragolette thought. “The old witch is in a good mood.”

After saying this, she set out with a light step. On the way she met Belebon, who was waiting for her.

“Where are you going this morning?” he asked.

“I’m going to your aunt Viperine’s house to fetch a casket.”

“Unfortunate girl!” cried Belebon. “You’re being sent to your death. No one has ever left Viperine’s castle alive. But I can save you. Give me a kiss, and I’ll look out for you.”

“No, I’ll never kiss the son of a witch!”

“Fragolette, Fragolette, you are ungrateful. Nevertheless, I love you more than my own life, and I’ll save you in spite of yourself. Listen to me carefully! When you have reached the bank of the mountain stream, you must say, ‘Beautiful stream, let me pass through your glistening white waters!’ Then take this bottle of oil, loaf of bread, rope, and small broom. Once you have reached the iron gate of the old castle, rub the hinges with oil, and it will open of its own accord. A large dog will arrive and start barking. Throw him this bread, and he will stop. In the courtyard you will see a poor woman forced to draw water from the well by tying the bucket to her braids of hair. Offer her this rope. Then go up the steps, and you’ll find another woman in the kitchen, forced to clean the oven with her tongue. Give her this broom and then enter the room where Viperine is asleep. The casket is on the cabinet. Take it and flee as fast as you can. If you listen to me, you won’t die.”

Fragolette remembered everything that Belebon told her. Once she reached the bank of the mountain stream, she cried out, “Beautiful stream, let me pass through your glistening white waters!”

In response, the nymph of the stream whispered in her sweetest tones, “Pass, kind girl.”

Immediately, the waters parted so that she could pass over dry soil. Soon after, she rubbed the gate with oil, and it opened of its own accord. The dog pounced on the bread and turned around two times, curled himself up, and lay down. Then he placed his head on his paws and looked tenderly at Fragolette. The two working women joyfully took the gifts that Fragolette brought them, and Fragolette silently entered the room where Viperine lay snoring. She ran to the cabinet and took the casket. Her heart beat loudly, and she thought she was safe when suddenly the witch awoke and saw that Fragolette was already on the steps.

"Hey, you there!" Viperine yelled to the woman in the kitchen. "Kill that thief for me!"

"I'm no longer doing your dirty work," the woman answered. "She's given me a broom, while you make me clean the oven with my tongue."

"Woman at the well," the witch cried, "grab that thief and drown her!"

"I'm no longer doing your dirty work," the woman answered. "She's given me a rope, while you make me draw up the bucket with my hair."

"Dog, tear her to pieces!"

"I'm no longer doing your dirty work," the mastiff said without even raising his head. "She's given me bread, while you let me die from starvation."

"Door, don't open for her!"

"I'm no longer doing your dirty work!" the door said. "She's oiled my hinges, while you let me rust away."

The witch sprang from her bed and reached the bottom of the steps with one jump, but the door, happy at regaining its freedom of movement, swung back and forth without stopping, and just as Viperine was about to go through, the door closed on her so suddenly that she was nearly crushed by it. Meanwhile Fragolette kept running without looking back. Though she was frightened, she didn't forget to pay a compliment to the mountain stream and crossed to the other side as she had done before.

Viperine was close behind her and cried out, "You dirty stream, make way for me, or I'll dry you up!"

The stream parted, but when Viperine was halfway through the water, the stream suddenly closed, and the witch was instantly drowned. The nymph was avenged.

On reaching home, Fragolette gave the casket to her terrible mistress, and you can imagine what a face the ogress made.

“This is one of Belebon’s new tricks,” she thought, “but I know how to gain revenge. Whoever laughs last, laughs best!”

## IV

That night, the witch made Fragolette sleep in her room. “Remember what I tell you,” she said. “In the chicken coop there are three cocks, one red, one black, and the third white. Tonight, when one of these cocks crows, you must tell me which one it is. Watch out if you guess wrong. I’ll make a good mouthful out of you.”

“Belebon will not be here,” Fragolette thought. “I’m lost.” And she didn’t close her eyes for one instant. Then, at midnight, one of the cocks crowed.

“Which cock was it that crowed?” the witch asked.

“Belebon,” Fragolette whispered, “tell me which one it was.”

“Give me a kiss,” a voice muttered, “and I’ll tell you.”

“No.”

“Cruel girl, I won’t let you die. It was the red one.”

The witch sprang from her bed and approached Fragolette.

“Answer, or I’ll eat you up.”

“It was the red cock that crowed,” said Fragolette, trembling.

And the witch grumbled and went back to bed. At that very same instant, another cock was heard.

“Which cock crowed?” asked the witch.

And Belebon whispered the answer to his beloved: “It was the black one.”

And the witch grumbled and went back to bed.

At daybreak, one of the cocks crowed again.

“Belebon, help me,” Fragolette cried.

“Give me a kiss,” he responded. “I’ve had enough of your cruelty.”

And just then, the witch opened her bloody mouth.

“Belebon, Belebon,” Fragolette cried, “if you forsake me, it’s you who will be my murderer!”

"It was the white cock," Belebon replied, unable to resist her tender feeling.

"It was the white cock!" Fragolette shouted.

"It doesn't matter to me, you traitor!" the ogress exclaimed in a rage. "Your time has come. You must die."

As she said these words, she fell upon her prey. But Fragolette was young and agile and escaped by opening the window and leaping into the garden. The furious witch began to chase after her, but she lost her momentum and caught her foot in the window. As a result, she fell headfirst and broke off the two teeth that gave her power and life. Now, beneath the window of the house, there was nothing but a corpse!

## V

Left alone with Belebon, Fragolette soon began to wonder what would become of her. She didn't think at all about returning to her own country. She was an orphan and had been forgotten. It was also clear to her that she couldn't stay in the house where she had suffered so much. For his part, Belebon said nothing. He was happy at having Fragolette near him and didn't think of the future.

There came a time, however, when Fragolette declared that she wanted to be set free. Belebon didn't dare refuse to let her go, but he reminded the ungrateful girl of all he had done for her and offered his heart and hand.

"No," said Fragolette, "I will not marry the son of a witch."

"Go, then," poor Belebon replied. "Go, since nothing will keep you. But before you leave this house, where I shall die far away from you, give me at least one token of friendship, the only one that you will have given me. Put your hand in mine and forgive me the crime of my birth. We will not part as strangers."

She extended her hand, which he took and covered with kisses. She did not withdraw it and looked at him in a singular way.

"Farewell, Fragolette," Belebon said, "you are taking my happiness and life with you. May that man to whom you give your hand be blessed a hundred times."

"Well, then," she said, "since you have it, you might as well keep it."

Stunned, he stood up and embraced her while sobbing. Meanwhile, the unpredictable girl took his head in her hands and kissed his forehead, laughing and crying at the same time. One can never tell what goes on in the heart of a woman. Two days later they were married.

Thus ends the story, but it is reasonable to ask what became of the pair. Did Belebon continue his mother's dangerous practices? Did Fragolette and her husband return to live the life of ordinary humans? I wrote and asked a Sicilian scholar about this. He was a member of the Academies of Catania, Agrigentum, and other places, and this is his answer:

> Most illustrious and revered signor, I have been unable to find in our ancient chronicles the name of either Fragolette or Belebon. Distrusting my own humble erudition, however, I consulted very learned brethren of all the Academies, and their answer has been that, among the records of all the people who successively conquered Sicily—the Pelasgians, Sicanians, Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs, Normans, Spaniards, and others—there has never been a trace of a sorcerer who married. We have reason, therefore, to believe by analogy that once Belebon married, he became no worse off than the others.

Such is the expert information I received, and it seems to me wise and convincing. I'll rely on my readers, both male and female, especially the latter, regarding this point.

# ■ The Fairy Crawfish

Here is a tale that has delighted people during their long evenings on the shores of the Baltic Sea for centuries. Even though it resembles one of our fairy tales from the north, I've never encountered it in any collection of French tales. So, if you don't know this story, dear reader, it will make you smile. If you do know it, I hope you won't be angry with me to reread it. It is always a double pleasure when you pass by and see an old tale or an old friend.

Once upon a time in the vicinity of the city of Revel a wood-cutter was living in a miserable hut situated near a deserted road on the edge of the forest. Loppi, for that was our hero's name, was as poor as Job and just as patient. In addition to this resemblance, heaven in its mercy had granted him a wife who might have taught things to the spouse of the patriarch Job. Her name was Masicas, which, people say, means wild strawberry. She was not naturally vicious and never got angry as long as other people agreed with her or did as she liked. But the rest of the time she was less sweet. If she was quiet from morning to evening, when her husband was in the forest or the fields, she yelled from evening to morning when her master was in the house. Indeed, it's true that, according to the old proverb, "horses quarrel when there is no hay in the rack." And there was not very much of anything in the woodcutter's hut. The spiders scarcely spun any webs, for there was not a fly to catch, and two mice that chanced to stray into the wretched dwelling died from starvation.

One day, when things were particularly miserable, and the friendly Masicas snarled more than usual, the good-natured woodcutter flung an empty sack, his sole valuable possession, over his shoulder, heaved a sigh, and fled from the house. He used to go out with this bag every morning in search of work, or, rather, to beg for alms. For the most part he was always more than happy when he could carry home a piece of dark bread, a head of cabbage, or a few potatoes given to him in charity.

This time, as he passed by a pond, illuminated by the first beams of day, he noticed a blackish object, lying motionless in the wet grass and looking like some unknown animal. He approached it without making any noise and saw an enormous crawfish that he never in his life had seen before. The morning sun, or perhaps fatigue, had put the creature to sleep. Consequently, he grabbed it around the body and threw it into his sack without giving it time to realize what was happening. All this took but a second. “What a godsend!” thought Loppi. “How happy my wife will be! It’s been a long time since she had such a feast.”

Loppi leaped with joy and then suddenly stopped and turned pale. A human voice emanated from the sack. It was the crawfish who spoke: “Hold on, my friend! Stop, and let me go free. I am the oldest of all the crawfish. I am more than a hundred years old. What could you do with my old carcass? It would corrode a wolf’s teeth. Don’t spoil the chance that has thrown me into your hands. Remember that I, like you, am one of God’s creatures, and take pity on me as you would like someone to take pity on you one day.”

“My dear crawfish,” the woodcutter answered, “you speak marvelously well, but don’t blame me if I don’t listen to your speech. If I had the choice, I’d willingly let you go, but my wife is waiting for me to bring her our dinner. If I return empty-handed and tell her that I caught the most beautiful crawfish that has ever been seen, and let it go, she will make such a racket that it will be heard from here to Revel. And, knowing her as I do, she is quite capable of meeting me with a broomstick.”

“Why do you need to tell your wife?” the crawfish asked.

Loppi scratched his ear, then his head, and heaved a deep sigh. “My dear friend,” he said, “if you knew Masicas and understood how savvy she is, you wouldn’t talk to me like this. She has a way of worming information out of you, whether you like it or not. There is no resisting her. She can turn you inside out like the skin of an eel and make you tell all you know, and even some things that you don’t know. She’s a master at this.”

“My dear friend,” the crawfish resumed, “I see that you belong to the brotherhood of good husbands. I congratulate you! But since an empty compliment will not help you in this affair, I am ready to redeem my liberty at a price that will please your madam. Don’t judge me by my appearance. I am a fairy and have some power. If you listen to me, you’ll benefit from all this, but if you turn a deaf ear, you will repent it all your life.”

“My God!” the woodcutter exclaimed. “I don’t want to hurt anybody. If you can arrange things so that Masicas is happy, I am quite ready to grant you your liberty!”

“What kind of fish does your wife prefer?”

“I have no idea. We poor people don’t have time to be choosy. It’s enough that I don’t return home empty-handed. No one will complain.”

“Put me on the ground,” the crawfish said, “then open your sack into that corner of the pond over there. Very good—and now: *Fish into the sack*!”

Has anyone ever seen a miracle like this? In an instant the sack was full of fish, so full, indeed, that it nearly slipped from the woodcutter’s hands.

“You can now see that I am obliged to you and not ungrateful,” the crawfish said to the dumbfounded woodcutter. “You can come here every morning and fill your sack by repeating the words: *Fish into the sack*. I will keep my promise. You have been kind to me, and I shall be kind to you. If some day you want to make a wish for something else, come to this pond and call me with these solemn words:

*Crawfish, dear friend,*
*My fortune I’d like to amend.*

I shall answer your voice, and see what I can do. Now, a last piece of friendly advice. If you want to be happy at home, be discreet, and say nothing to your wife about what has happened today.”

“I’ll try, Madam Fairy,” the woodcutter answered. Then, taking the crawfish around the waist, he gently put her into the water, and she plunged out of sight. As to the proud and happy Loppi, he went on his way to his hut with a light step and a lighter heart. No sooner did he enter the dwelling than he opened his sack, and a pike about a yard long sprang from it, followed by a large golden carp, which leaped into the air and fell back gasping for breath. Then two fine tenches and a mass of whitefish appeared. Anyone would have said that these fish were the pick of the

Revel fish market. At the sight of all this richness, Masicas uttered a cry of joy and threw her arms around Loppi.

“My husband, my dear husband, love of my life!” she exclaimed. “You see how right your little wife was in making you go out so early this morning to seek your fortune! This will teach you to listen to her all the time. What beautiful fish! Go into the garden, and you’ll find a little garlic and onions. Then run to the woods and get some nice-looking mushrooms. I’ll make you a fish soup better than anything a king or emperor has ever tasted. Then we will broil the carp, and we shall have a feast fit for a king.”

The meal was a merry one. Masicas had no wish but to please her husband. Loppi thought that their honeymoon had come again. But, alas! The very next day, which was Monday, the fish he brought home were more coldly received. On the fourth day Madam pouted, and on Sunday she exploded.

“Have you sworn to lock me up in a convent? Am I a nun you’ve condemned to keep Lent for all eternity? What can be more tasteless than this fish? There’s nothing here that moves my heart.”

“What do you want, then?” cried good Loppi, who had not yet forgotten his previous poverty.

“Nothing but what every honest peasant family has to eat. A good soup and a piece of roast pork. I don’t need more than that to be happy. I’m content with very little.”

“It’s true,” the woodcutter thought, “that the fish from the pond is a little tasteless, and that there’s nothing so good for an aching stomach as a nice slice of pork. But will the fairy be able to grant me such a great favor?”

At daybreak the next morning he rushed to the pond and called his benefactress:

*Crawfish, dear friend,*
*My fortune I’d like to amend.*

All at once, a large claw rose from the water, then another, and then a head with a bishop’s cap and two great staring eyes.

“What do you want, brother?” a familiar voice asked.

“Nothing for myself,” the woodcutter answered. “There’s nothing that I desire. But my wife doesn’t have a strong stomach and has begun to tire of fish. She’d like something else. For example, soup, or roast pork.”

“If that is all your dear wife needs to make her happy, I can satisfy her,” the crawfish answered. “At dinnertime, tap the table three times with your little finger and say each time, ‘Soup and roast appear!’ and you will be served. But take care! Perhaps your wife’s wishes may not always be so modest. Don’t become a slave to them, or you may repent all this when it is too late.”

“I’ll try,” Loppi sighed.

At the appointed hour the dinner appeared on the table. Masicas was overcome with joy. The gentleness of a lamb and the tenderness of a dove were nothing compared to the gratitude she showed her husband. These golden days lasted a whole week. But before long, times changed and became cloudy until the storm broke on the head of the innocent Loppi.

“How long is this torture to last? Do you want me to die by feeding me on this salty soup and greasy pork? I’m not a woman who will put up with such contempt for very long.”

“What do you want then, my love?” Loppi asked.

“I want a dinner that respectable people eat—a roast goose and some tarts for dessert.”

How could he respond to this? Indeed, there were a number of observations that he could have made, but Loppi didn’t feel capable of risking the peace of the family. Just a look from his wife would have driven him into the earth. A man is so weak when he loves!

Poor Loppi did not close his eyes that night. Early the next morning he set out for the pond and walked up and down the bank for a long time. He was tormented by anxiety. If the fairy thought he was indiscreet by asking too much, what was he to do? At last he summoned his courage and began to cry out:

*Crawfish, dear friend,*
*My fortune I’d like to amend.*

“What do you want, my brother?” a voice that made him tremble responded.

“Nothing for myself. I don’t desire anything. But my wife’s stomach is beginning to tire of soup and roast pork. She would like something light like a roast goose and some tarts.”

“Is that all?” the good fairy replied. “We shall try to satisfy her once more. Return home, brother, and don’t come to me every time your wife wishes to change her menu for her dinner. Let her order what she likes, for the table is a faithful servant and will obey every order she makes.”

No sooner said than done. By the time he returned to his dwelling, the woodcutter found the table already set with pewter mugs and plates, wrought-iron spoons, and three-pronged steel forks. The fairy had done things on a grand scale, to say nothing of the roast goose and potatoes, stewed sauce, and a beautiful plum pudding. Nothing was missing on the table, not even a flask of anisette to enliven the feast. This time Loppi thought all his troubles would end.

Alas! Sometimes it is unfortunate for a husband to inspire his wife in such a way that she has too high a regard for the ability of her lord and master. Indeed, Masicas was smart enough to understand that there was something a bit magical about this miraculous abundance. So, one day she insisted on knowing what good genius was protecting them. At first Loppi tried to keep quiet, but how could one resist a wife so trusting, tender, and lovable? Loppi yielded to his wife’s pleas, but let the first husband who would not do the same thing dare throw a stone at him and tell it at home. I would consider him bolder than Alexander and more audacious than Caesar.

Masicas had sworn not to reveal this precious secret to anyone. She kept her promise. (There was not a neighbor within two miles of their hut.) But if she kept the secret, she took care not to forget it.

Well, whoever is on the lookout for a good opportunity generally finds it quickly. One evening, when Masicas had charmed her husband with her good mood and a relaxed air, she said, “Loppi, my good Loppi, you’ve been lucky, but you don’t know how to make the most of your luck. You don’t think about your little wife. I dine like a princess, and dress like a beggar. Am I so old and ugly that you are willing to let me go around in rags? I don’t say this out of vanity, my love. There’s only one man I care to please. However, I must have clothes like a lady. Don’t tell me that you can’t do anything about this,” she added with the most gracious smile. “I know you. I know that the fairy will fill all your wishes. Can you deny your wife’s modest request when she lives only for you?”

When a woman asks for an elegant outfit so that she can appear beautiful only in her husband’s eyes, how could he act like a barbarian and refuse her, even if it might mean a new outfit every day? Loppi was not a monster. Indeed, from the bottom of his heart, he thought that Masicas wasn’t wrong. Dressed in their poor clothes, they seemed to be eating stolen food. How much brighter their table would be with a well-dressed mistress of the house at its head!

Despite these good reasons, Loppi was not in an easy frame of mind when he set out for the pond. He began to fear that he was going too far. Moreover, it was not without a certain dread that he called his benefactress:

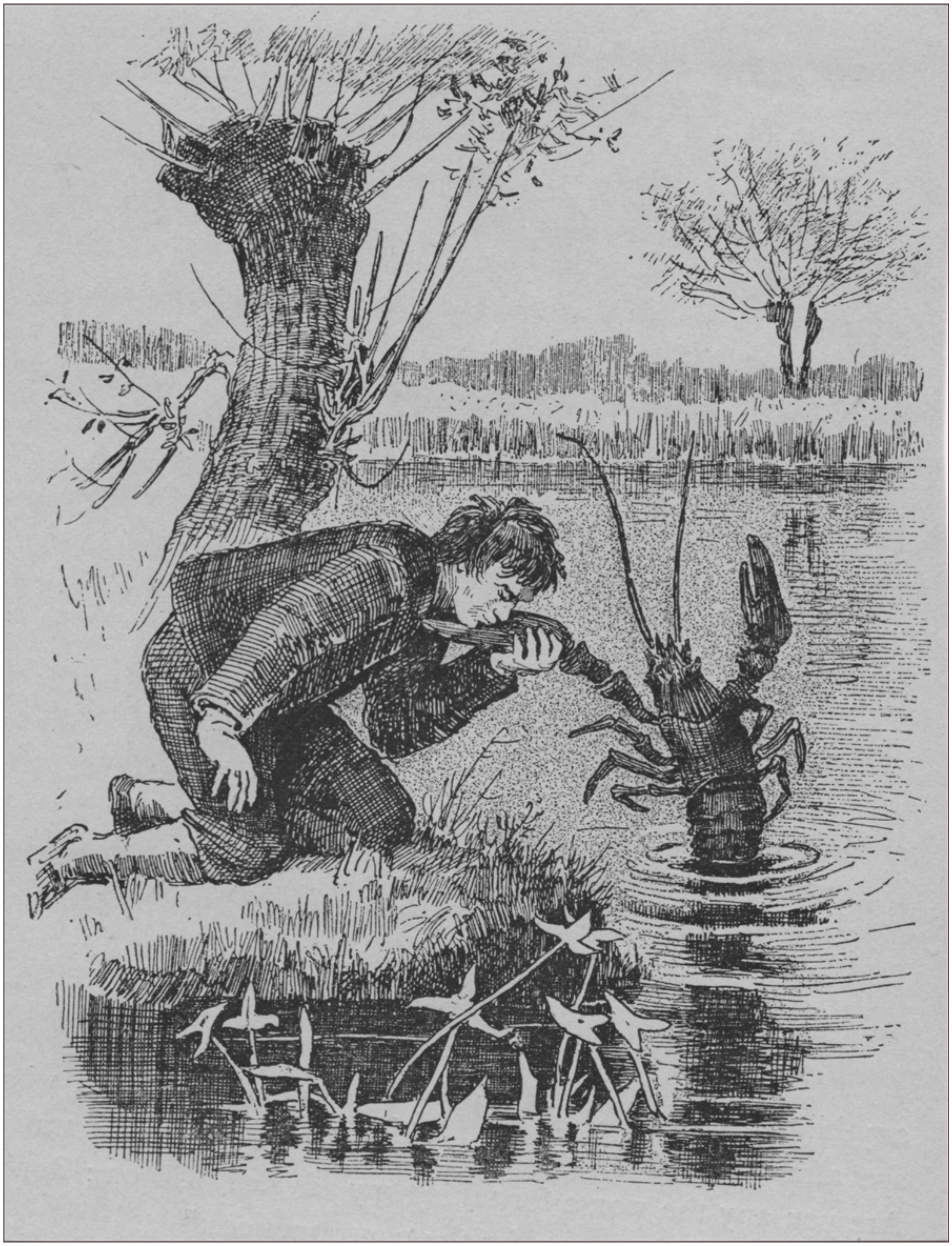
*Crawfish, dear friend,*
*My fortune I’d like to amend.*

Suddenly the fairy appeared above the water and said, “What do you want, my brother?”

“Nothing for myself. I don’t desire anything. But you are so good and generous that my wife once again wishes for a little more in her turn. She’s pleased by the good food, but it’s not quite enough. Her rags remind her of our former misery, and now she wants to be dressed like a lady.”

The good crawfish laughed and said, “Return home, my brother; your wife’s wishes are granted.”

Loppi could not find words enough to express his thanks and insisted on kissing his friend’s claw. He sang along the road and was as cheerful and carefree as a lark. Along the way he met a beautiful lady, wearing a woolen dress, silk, and furs. He bowed humbly to the noble stranger, when suddenly the princess laughed in his face and embraced him. It was Masicas, in all her beauty, and, to speak frankly, she was second to none in majesty and grace. When it comes to women, it’s certainly true to say that the habit makes the monk and the feathers, the bird.



This time Masicas was happy. It cannot be denied. But it is the misfortune of happy people that their desires engender desires. Of what use was it to play the lady when she lived isolated in a miserable hut without the possibility of making a neighbor die from jealousy, and without a mirror that she could use to admire herself from head to toe?

Masicas had not paraded about in her gown and furs for a week when she said to her husband, “I’ve been thinking about our new situation. It is ridiculous. I cannot continue to live this way any longer. A miserable hut open on all sides does not suit a princely table and elegant dress. The fairy has too much sense, and she loves you too well, my dear husband, not to feel that she owes us a mansion where I can play lady of the castle all day long. If she were to fulfill this wish, I would have nothing left to desire.”

“Alas! We are lost,” Loppi cried. “If you pull the cord too tight, it’s bound to snap. Then we shall fall into poverty worse than the way we were before. Why not be content with what we have? Many people would be happy to enjoy the sense of well-being that we have!”

“Loppi,” Masicas said impatiently, “you will never make anything of yourself. You’re just a coward! … Don’t you know that people who live in shame are the losers in life? Are you any the worse for taking my advice? Go on! Don’t be afraid! I’ll answer for all the consequences.”

She continued provoking the good man until he departed. Along the way, his legs began to tremble. If the fairy were to refuse to listen to him anymore, he would perhaps be consoled. But how would he be able to face his wife’s despair on his return? He wouldn’t have the strength to withstand the storm she would cause. The only way in which he could summon his courage was to vow within his heart that, if the crawfish said no, he would fling himself headfirst into the pond. No matter how violent the remedy might be, it seemed lesser than the evil. No one is braver than a coward when cornered. So, when the woodcutter spoke, it was in a tremendously loud voice:

*Crawfish, dear friend,*
*My fortune I’d like to amend.*

“What do you want, brother?” the fairy replied.

“Nothing for myself. I don’t desire anything. But my wife, despite all the wishes you have fulfilled, torments me night and day and demands that I ask you to fulfill yet another wish against my will.”

“Oh, oh!” the crawfish cried. “This is a whole new approach. You’ve told our secret to your wife. Now you may say farewell to peace at home. And what does this fair lady ask, now that she thinks she has me in her power?”

“A mansion, good fairy, a modest little castle, so that her house may match the beautiful clothes you have given her. Make Masicas a baroness, and she will be so happy that we’ll have nothing more to ask of you.”

“Brother,” the crawfish answered gravely, “let it be as your wife desires.”

And she abruptly disappeared.

Loppi had some trouble in finding his way back. The entire aspect of the countryside had changed. Now there were well-tilled fields around him and pastures full of cattle. Straight ahead he saw a brick mansion in the middle of a garden full of fruit and flowers. What was this castle that he had never seen before? As he was admiring it, a richly dressed lady came down the steps. How strange it was! The baroness smiled at him and held out her hand. It was Masicas.

“At last,” she exclaimed, “I have nothing more to wish for. Kiss me, my dear Loppi. My wishes have been fulfilled. I thank you and also the good fairy.”

You can’t imagine how delighted and ravished Loppi was! No dream could have been more beautiful. Loppi wept with joy when he thought that, in less than an hour, they had gone from poverty to riches and from contempt to respect. Indeed, now he was living in a castle with a gracious woman, always in a good mood, whose only thought was to please him.

But unfortunately there is no dream without an awakening. Masicas tasted all the pleasures of wealth and grandeur. All the barons and baronesses in the vicinity argued with one another to obtain the honor of visiting her and inviting her to their mansions. The governor of the province was at her feet. Her dresses, castle, horses, and stables were the talk of the entire region. Didn’t she have the finest trotters in the country, English cows with scarcely any horns and still less milk, English hens that seldom laid eggs but were as beautiful and wild as pheasants, and English pigs so fat that neither head, tail, nor feet could be seen? What did Masicas lack, then, to make her the happiest of women? Alas! Everything had succeeded but too well for her. Her ambition ate away at her heart. She felt that she was born to rule and did not hide it from her husband. The great lady wished to become a queen.

“Don’t you see,” she told Loppi, “how everyone obeys me with respect? Why? It’s because I am always right. Even you, who are more stubborn than a mule, are compelled to recognize that I’m never wrong. I was born to be a queen! I feel it.”

Loppi began protesting again, but he was told dryly that he was nothing but a simpleton. If it weren’t for her, they wouldn’t have their castle. Wasn’t she the one who had pushed him to return to the crawfish against his will? It would be the same way this time. He would be king, in spite of himself, and it was to his wife that he would owe his crown.

Loppi had no wish at all to rule. He had good breakfasts and even better dinners. He didn’t desire much more than that. But above all, he loved to take naps and rests, and he couldn’t forget that, given his beloved better half, he could enjoy his rest only on condition that he submit to Madam’s will and whims. He scratched his head and sighed. It’s even said that he swore a little. Nevertheless, he set out, and on reaching the pond he called in a tender voice to his dear friend the crawfish.

When he saw the black claws rise from the water and heard the “What do you want, my brother?” he stood still for some time because he was aware that his request was excessive. Finally, he responded: “Nothing for myself. I don’t desire anything. But my wife is getting tired of being a baroness.”

“What does she want, then?” asked the fairy.

“Alas!” Loppi murmured. “She wants to be a queen.”

“Oh, oh!” the crawfish. “It is lucky for you and her that you saved my life. So, this time also I’ll grant your wife’s wish with much joy! Greetings, husband of a queen. I hope you have a good deal of pleasure. Good evening, Prince Consort!”

When Loppi returned home, the castle had become a palace. Masicas was a queen. Valets, chamberlains, and pages were rushing about in all directions to execute the commands of their sovereign.

“God be praised,” the woodcutter thought. “I have found peace and quiet at last! Masicas is at the top of the ladder. She can’t climb any higher; and she has so many around her to do her will that I can sleep in peace without her insisting on waking me.”

Nothing is more fragile than the happiness of kings, except that of queens.

Two months had hardly passed when Masicas had a new whim and sent for Loppi.

“I am tired of being queen,” she said. “I’m sick to death of the platitudes of these courtiers. I want to rule over free men. So, you’re to go to the fairy one last time and make her give me what I desire.”

“Good heavens!” Loppi cried. “If a crown doesn’t satisfy you, what will? Perhaps by chance you want to be God himself?”

“Why not?” Masicas answered calmly. “Would the world be any the worse governed?”

On hearing this blasphemy, Loppi gazed at his wife. He was stupefied. The poor woman had evidently lost her mind. He shrugged his shoulders.

“Say and do what you like,” he said. “I’m not going to trouble the fairy with such madness.”

“We will see about that!” the queen cried in a rage. “Do you forget who I am? Obey me this very instant, or off goes your head.”

“I’m going! I’ll run as fast as I can!” the woodcutter exclaimed. “One way or the other I’ll die,” he thought. “Either by the hand of the fairy or by that of my wife. Perhaps the crawfish will have pity on me.”

He staggered like a drunken man and found himself at the edge of the pond without knowing how he arrived there. Then he immediately cried out like a man in despair,

*Crawfish, dear friend,*
*My fortune I’d like to amend.*

This time there was no voice to respond to his. The pond remained silent. Not even the buzz of a fly was heard. He called a second time. But there was no echo. Terrified, he called a third time.

“What do you want?” a harsh voice answered.

“Nothing for myself. I don’t desire anything. But the queen my wife has made me come here for the last time.”

“What more does she want?”

Loppi fell on his knees. “Forgive me. It’s not my fault. She wants to be God.”

The crawfish rose halfway out of the water, stretched her claw threateningly toward Loppi, and cried out, “Your wife deserves to be locked up in prison, and you to be hanged, you nasty imbecile! It is the cowardice of husbands that causes the madness of wives. Get yourself to your kennel, you miserable dog! To your kennel!”

And she dove into the pond in such a fury that the water hissed as if a red-hot iron had been dipped in it. Loppi fell face forward onto the ground as if struck by lightning. As he set out for home with his head hanging, he recognized only too well the road he had traveled so often. The edge of the forest was bordered by lean birches and sickly firs. He saw stagnant pools here and there, and, farther on, a miserable hut. He had fallen once again into wretched poverty deeper than ever.

What would Masicas say? How would he console her? He didn’t have much time for these sad thoughts because a witch-like hag in tatters flung herself around his neck as if to strangle him.

“Here you are at last, you monster!” she exclaimed. “It’s you who has ruined us by your clumsiness and stupidity. It’s you who has irritated that cursed crawfish so that she is against me! I might have expected it. You’ve never loved me. You’ve never done anything for me. You’ve always been nothing but an egotist. Now you will die by my hand!”

She would have torn out Loppi’s eyes, if he had not held back both her arms with great difficulty.

“Watch out, Masicas! Calm down, or you will hurt yourself.”

It was all in vain. Loppi felt he was losing his grip when suddenly the veins in the throat of his furious wife swelled. Her face turned purple, and she violently threw herself backward. Then she flung up her arms and fell heavily on the ground. She was dead. Her rage had killed her.

Loppi mourned for his wife, as every good husband ought to do. He buried her with his own hands under a large fir tree nearby. Then he placed a gravestone over the burial site and surrounded it with a rough wall to keep out the wild beasts of the forest. Once he completed this sad task, he returned home and tried to forget everything. However, he was overcome by despair, for he was not made to live alone.

"What shall I do? What will become of me?" he wept. "Here I am, alone, forsaken, a burden to myself. Who will think for me, choose for me, speak for me, and act for me, as my dear wife used to do? Who will waken me ten times during the night to tell me what I must do tomorrow? I am nothing but a body without a soul. I am nothing but a corpse. Without my beloved Masicas, my life has vanished. I have nothing left to do but to die."

He spoke the truth. Early the next winter, a peasant made his way through the forest and noticed a man lying in the snow. It was Loppi, who had been dead a week, dead of cold, hunger, and sorrow, without a friend or neighbor to close his eyes. His icy fingers grasped an awl, with which he had engraved on the gravestone his last tribute to his wife, who had been the delight of his life:

*To the Best of Wives from the Most Inconsolable of Husbands*

## ■ The Three Wishes

There was once a wise emperor who had issued the following law:

> *Every stranger who comes to my court will be served fish. The servants will carefully watch the newcomer, and if, after eating the fish down to the bone, he turns it over to eat the other side, the man will be declared guilty of this egregious crime and will instantly be arrested. Three days later he is to be hanged. But, through our imperial grace, the culprit may make a wish each day that will be granted immediately, provided he does not ask for his life.*

More than one victim had already been convicted of committing this crime, when one day a count, followed by his young son, appeared at the royal court. The two noble guests were welcomed in the warmest manner; and, in accordance with the emperor’s law, they were served fried fish in the middle of their meal. Both father and son relished it heartily, and, after eating down to the bone, the count turned over the fatal fish. All at once, he was seized by two servants and dragged before the emperor, who ordered him to be taken to the prison. This caused the count’s young son such great sorrow that he begged the emperor to let him be executed in his father’s place. Now, since the emperor was not a vicious man, and since he did not care who was hanged as long someone was hanged, he accepted the trade. Consequently, the son was thrown into jail, and the father was released.

Once in his dungeon, the young man said to his jailers, “You know that, before dying, I am entitled to three wishes. So, I want you to go to the emperor and tell him to send me his daughter and a priest who is to marry us right away.”

Nobody was more surprised by this insolent demand than the furious emperor. Nevertheless, a sovereign’s word is sacred, and he can hardly break his own law. His daughter, moreover, was resigned to this three-day marriage, and, like a good father, the emperor gave his consent.

The next day the prisoner asked the emperor to send him his treasure. This demand was hardly less indiscreet than that of the day before. Yet, how is it possible to refuse a man who is to be hanged on the morrow? Therefore, the emperor sent him his money and jewels, which the young man immediately proceeded to share among all the courtiers. And, since at that time there were those at court weak enough to be fond of money, they began to take an interest in this poor young man who had been raised so well.

On the third day, the emperor, who had slept badly, went himself to the condemned man and said, “Come and quickly tell me your last wish. Once I grant it, you will be strung up right away because I’m getting tired of your demands.”

“Sire,” the young man replied, “I have only one last favor to ask of Your Majesty. After that I shall die content. I would like you to blind the eyes of all those who saw my father turn over the fish.”

“Very well,” the emperor said. “Your demand is quite natural and does credit to the goodness your heart.”

After saying this, the emperor had the majordomo arrested.

“Me, sire!” the majordomo cried. “I saw nothing of the kind. It was the cupbearer who saw everything.”

“Seize the cupbearer,” the emperor exclaimed, “and blind his eyes!”

But the cupbearer declared with tears that he had seen nothing, and he pointed at the taster, who pointed at the butler, who pointed at the repairman, who pointed at the first waiter, who pointed at the second, who pointed at the third. In short, no one had seen the count turn over the fish.

“Father,” the princess said, “I appeal to you as a new Solomon. If no one saw anything, the count isn’t guilty, and my husband is innocent.”

The emperor frowned, and all at once, the courtiers began murmuring with closed lips. Then the emperor smiled, and all at once, they opened their mouths.

“All right,” he said, “let this innocent young man live. I have hanged more than one man no more guilty of this crime than he is. But even if he is not hanged, he is married. So, justice has been done.”

# ■ Falsehood and Truth

In olden times, Falsehood and Truth resolved to live together like a pair of friends. Truth was a good person, simple, timid, and confident. Falsehood was a smooth talker, elegant and daring. One commanded, and the other always obeyed. Everything went well in such a friendly partnership.

One day Falsehood suggested to Truth that she would do well to plant a tree that would provide them with blossoms and flowers in the spring, shade in the summer, and fruit in autumn. Truth was pleased with the plan, and the tree was planted right away.

As soon as it began to grow, Falsehood said to Truth: “Sister, let us each choose a part of the tree. A community that is too close together breeds strife. Good accounts make for good friends. For example, there are the roots of the tree. They support and nourish it. They are sheltered from wind and weather. Why don’t you take them? To oblige you, I will content myself, for my part, with the branches that grow in the open air, at the mercy of birds, beasts, and men, wind, heat, and frost. There’s nothing that we would not do for those we love!”

Confused by such generosity, Truth thanked her comrade and burrowed underground to the great joy of Falsehood, who found himself alone among people and was able to reign at his ease.

The tree grew fast, and its large branches spread shade and coolness far and wide, and it soon produced blossoms more radiant than the rose. Men and women came from everywhere to admire the marvel. Perched upon the topmost branch, Falsehood called them and soon charmed them with his sweet words. He taught them that society is nothing but falsehood, and that men should be ready to tear each other to pieces if they spoke the truth.

“There are three ways to succeed here below,” he added, “by simple falsehood, as when the slave says to his lord, ‘I respect and love you’; by double falsehood, as when he exclaims, ‘May lightning strike me if I am not your most faithful servant'; and by triple falsehood, as when he repeats, 'My wealth, my arm, and my life all belong to my lord,' and then deserts his master at the moment of danger."

The sly Falsehood gave these lessons in a cheerful manner and supported them with such appropriate examples that everyone who heard him was thrilled by his words. They pointed to those who did not applaud and even began to suspect each other. For a hundred miles around, nobody talked about anything except Falsehood and his wisdom. Some thought he should be king. As to good Truth, who lay crouching in her den, no one gave her a thought. She might just as well have been dead and forgotten.

Abandoned as she was by everyone, she was forced to live on whatever she could find beneath the ground, while Falsehood was enthroned among green pastures and flowers. One day the poor mole gnawed the bitter roots of the tree that Truth had planted, and it gnawed them so deep that, another day, when Falsehood, more eloquent than usual, was addressing a large crowd of people, the wind rose slightly and suddenly blew down the tree, which no longer had any roots to support it. As branches fell, they crushed all who were beneath them. Falsehood escaped with an injured eye and broken leg, which left him lame and squinting. Nevertheless, he managed to pull himself out of trouble once again.

Now Truth was suddenly restored to light and rose from the ground with disheveled hair and a stern countenance and began harshly to rebuke the people around her for their weakness and credulity. No sooner did Falsehood hear her voice than he cried, "Look! There is the instigator of all our ills—the one who has nearly destroyed us! Death to her! Death to her!"

As soon as the people heard this, they armed themselves with sticks and stones and pursued the unfortunate woman. Once they caught her, they pushed her again into the hole, more dead than alive. After doing this, they quickly sealed it with a large stone so that Truth might never more rise from her tomb.

However, she still had a few friends, for during the night an unknown hand carved the following epitaph upon the stone:

Here lies Truth,
Killed by the cruel world,
Not by illness,
And now nothing can reign

But Falsehood and Dishonesty.

It is Falsehood’s smallest fault not to suffer contradiction. So, under his sway, the people searched for Truth’s friend, and as soon as he was found, he was hanged. It is only the dead who don’t complain.

To be more certain of his victory, Falsehood built himself a palace over Truth’s tomb. But it is said that sometimes she turns in her grave. When this happens, the palace crumbles like a house of cards and buries all the inhabitants, both innocent and guilty, beneath its ruins.

But the people have other things to do than mourn their dead. They continue to fulfill their inheritance. Those eternal dupes rebuild the palace each time more beautiful than the old ones, and Falsehood, lame and squinting, continues to reign there to this very day.

# ■ The Sun's Daughter

There was once a woman who did not have any children and could not be consoled because she longed so much for one. Well, one day she said to the Sun, "My good Sun, if you will give me a daughter, you may take her back when she turns twelve years old."

The Sun immediately sent a daughter to the good woman, who named her Letiko, and cherished her for twelve years like the apple of her eye. But one day, when Letiko was gathering herbs, the Sun came to her and said, "My child, when you go home, tell your mother to remember what she promised me."

Letiko went home and said to the good woman, "Mother, as I was gathering herbs, a handsome gentleman came and told me to remind you about what you had promised him."

Upon hearing this message, the good woman trembled and turned pale. Then she began to shut the doors and windows and stop up the holes and crevices so that the Sun would not be able to penetrate the house and carry off Letiko. Unfortunately, she forgot to block the keyhole, and the Sun sent through it one of his rays that seized Letiko, and carried her away.

The Sun was not a bad master, but while serving him, Letiko could not forget the mother she had lost. One day the Sun sent her to the barn for some hay. Letiko seated herself on the bales of hay and sighed, "Just as this hay is crushed beneath my feet, so my heart is crushed by the loss of my mother."

She stayed so long in the barn that the Sun called to her, "Letiko, what are you doing there?"

"My shoes are too large. I can't walk in them," she answered.

In response, the Sun made her smaller shoes. Then, another day the Sun sent her for water. On reaching the spring, Letiko sighed, "My heart moans for my poor mother just as this water moans as it falls."

She stayed so long at the spring that the Sun called to her, “Letiko, what are you doing there?”

“My skirt is too long. It’s preventing me from walking,” she replied.

In response, the Sun cut off the hem of her skirt.

Another time the Sun sent her for a pair of sandals. When Letiko obtained the sandals and was returning to the Sun, she sat down by the roadside and sighed, “My heart cries out for my mother just as this leather creaks in my hand.”

She remained seated there so long that the Sun called to her, “Letiko, what are you doing there?”

“My hat is too large. It’s falling over my eyes and prevents me from walking.”

In response, the Sun cut off the brim of her hat.

At last the Sun saw that Letiko was despondent. He sent her to the barn for hay one more time and listened at the door. When he heard the child cry out for her mother, he decided to summon two foxes. “Will you take Letiko back home?” he asked.

“Why not?”

“But if you are hungry and thirsty, what will you eat and drink on the way?”

“We will eat the child’s flesh and drink her blood,” answered the honest foxes.

When the Sun heard this, he said to himself, “Good people, you will not do for me.”

He thanked the foxes and then called two hares.

“Will you take Letiko back to her mother?”

“Of course, we will.”

“But if you are hungry and thirsty, what will you eat and drink on the way?”

“We will eat the grass in the fields and drink the water in the springs.”

“Good, take the child. I trust her to you.”

And, immediately thereafter the hares set out with Letiko, but the way was long, and they became hungry.

“Dear Letiko,” the hares said to the young girl, “climb this tree and stay there till we have satisfied our hunger.”

Letiko climbed the tree, and the hares ran into the forest. They were hardly out of sight when a lamia appeared beneath the tree. This is what an ogress is called in Greece.

She was a horrible old witch with only one eye in the middle of her forehead and a huge mouth with two tremendous teeth.

“Letiko! Letiko! Come down and see what beautiful shoes I have on my feet!” she cried.

“Mine are as beautiful as yours.”

“Come down, I’m in a hurry. My house hasn’t been swept.”

“Go and sweep it, and come back when it’s done.”

The lamia ran home and rushed back as fast as she could.

“Letiko! Letiko!” she cried. “Come down and see what a beautiful sash I have on.”

“My sash is more beautiful than yours.”

“If you don’t come down quickly, I will cut down the tree and eat you up.”

“Cut it down first, and eat me up afterward.”

And, all at once, the ogress struck the tree without being able to make it budge.

“Letiko! Letiko! Hurry! I must go and feed my babies.”

“Go and feed them, and come back when you are finished.”

After the monster had departed, Letiko cried out, “Help! My hares, help!”

And one of the hares said to the other, “Brother, do you hear? The child is calling us.”

All at once, they came running like the wind. Letiko sprang from the tree, and all three took to their heels. The witch hurried back as fast as she could, but the bird had flown the cage, and she didn’t know which direction Letiko had taken, east, west, north, or south. When the lamia saw some men working in the fields, she went to them, but they were as deaf as posts.

“Have you seen anyone pass by here?” she asked.

“We are planting beans,” they answered.

“I asked if you had seen anyone pass by here?” she cried in a furious voice.

“What’s the matter?” replied the good men. “Are you deaf? We are planting beans, do you hear? Beans, beans, beans!”

When Letiko approached the house, the dog scented her and cried, “Bow, wow, wow! Letiko is here!”

The cat, which was promenading on the roof, spotted the child from afar, and began to cry out, “Meow, meow! Letiko is here!”

The poor mother answered, “Hush, cruel beast, do you want me to die from grief?”

In turn, the cock stretched his neck and head and also saw the child.

“Cock-a-doodle-doo! Cock-a-doodle-doo! Letiko is here.”

And the poor mother began to weep, “Hush, cruel bird, do you want me to die from grief?”

The three friends approached the door, but the ogress was at their heels and had them just within her grasp. But Letiko rushed in first and saved herself. The hares followed, one after the other. However, the last one left the fur of his tail in the witch’s clutches. On seeing this, the poor mother grabbed the hare, brought it inside, and cried, “Welcome my good hare! You have brought my daughter back to me, and I’ll reward you by painting your tail silver.”

And ever since that day all hares have a silver tail.

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